WANDA

THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/wandaouida03ouid

WANDA

III.

NEW NOVELS AT EVERY LIBRARY,

Each in Three Volumes.

HEART AND SCIENCE. By WILKIE COLLINS.

THE CAPTAINS' ROOM. By WALTER BESANT.

WOMEN ARE STRANGE. By F. W. ROBINSON.

OF HIGH DEGREE. By CHARLES GIBBON.

THE GOLDEN SHAFT. By CHARLES GIBBON.

KIT: a Memory. By JAMES PAYN.

VAL STRANGE. By DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

REGIMENTAL LEGENDS. By J. S. WINTER.

GIDEON FLEYCE. By HENRY W. LUCY.

DUST: a Story. By JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

SELF-CONDEMNED. By Mrs. ALFRED HUNT.

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

WANDA

BY

OUIDA

'Doch!—alles was dazu mich trieb;
Gott!—war so gut, ach, war so lieb!' Goethe

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1883

[*All rights reserved*]

LONDON : PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

4527
W18
v.3

WANDA.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN they came home from their tour amidst the mines of Galicia and the plains of Hungary, and from their reception amongst the adoring townsfolk of restored Idrac, the autumn was far advanced, and the long rains and the wild winds of October had risen, making of every brook a torrent.

On their return she found intelligence from Paris that a friend of her father's, and her own godfather, the Duc de Noira, had died, bequeathing her his gallery of pictures, and his art collection of the eighteenth century,

552725

which were both famous. The Duc had been a Legitimist and a hermit. He had been unmarried, and had spent all the latter years of his life in amassing treasures of art, for which he had no heir of his own blood to care a jot. The bequest was a very precious one, and her presence in Paris was requested. Regretful for herself to leave Hohenszalras, she perceived that to Sabran the tidings were welcome. Moved by an unselfish impulse she said at once:

'Go alone; go instead of me; your presence will be the same as mine. Paris will amuse you more if you are by yourself, and you will be so happy amongst all those Lancrets and Fragonards, those Reiseiners and Gauthières. The collection is a marvel, but entirely of the Beau Siècle. You never saw it? No! I think the Duc never opened his doors to anyone save to half a dozen old tried friends, and he had a horror of turning his *salons* into show-rooms. If you think well, we will leave it all as it is, buying the house if we can. All that eighteenth century *bibeloterie* would not suit this place, and I should like to keep it all as he kept it; that is the only true respect to show to a legacy.'

Sabran hesitated; he was tempted, yet he was half reluctant to yield to the temptation. He felt that he would willingly be by himself

awhile, yet he loved his wife too passionately to quit her without pain. His own conscience made her presence at times oppress and trouble him, yet he had never lost the half-religious adoration with which she had first inspired him. He suggested a compromise—why should they not winter in Paris?

She was about to dissent, for of all seasons in the Tauern she loved the winter best; but when she looked at him she saw such eager anticipation on his face that she suppressed her own wishes unuttered.

'We will go, if you like,' she said, without any hesitation or reluctance visible. 'I dare say we can find some pretty house. Aunt Ottilie will be pleased; there is nothing here which cannot do without us for a time, we have such trusty stewards; only I think it would be more change for you if you went alone.'

'No!' he said; 'separation is a sort of death; do not let us tempt fate by it. Life is so short at its longest; it is ingratitude to lose an hour that we can spend together.'

'There was never such a lover since Petrarca,' she said, with a smile. 'Nay, you eclipse him: he was never tried by marriage.'

But though he jested at it, his great love for her seemed like a beautiful light about her life. What did his state-secret matter? What

did it matter what cause had led him to avoid political life?—he loved her so well.

The following month they were in Paris, having found an hotel in the Boulevard St. Germain, standing in a great sunny garden; and when they were fairly installed there, the Princess and the children and the horses followed them, and their arrival made an event of great interest and importance in the city which of all others in the world it is hardest thus to impress.

The Countess von Szalras, a notability always, was celebrated just then as the inheritress of the coveted Noira collection, which it had been fondly hoped would have gone to the hammer; and Sabran, popular always, and not forgotten here, where most things and people are forgotten in a week, was courted, flattered, and welcomed by men and by women; and as he rode down the Allée des Acacias, or entered the Mirlitons, he felt himself at home. His beautiful wife, his beautiful children, his incomparable horses, his marvellous good fortune were the talk of all those who had already left their country-houses for the winter *rentrée*, and attained a publicity, beginning with the great Szalras pearls and ending with the babies' white donkeys, which was the greatest of all possible offences to her; she abhorred and

contemned publicity with the sensitiveness of a delicate temper and the contempt of a scornful patrician.

To Sabran it was not so offensive; there was the Slav in him, which loved display, and was not ill-pleased by notoriety. All this admiration around them made him feel that his life after all had been a great success, that he had drawn prizes in the lottery of fate which all men envied him; it helped him to forget Egon Vàsàrhely. He had never so nearly felt affection for Bela as when lines of men and women stood still to watch the handsome child gallop on his pony down the avenues of the Bois.

'Life is after all like baccara or billiards,' he said to himself. 'It is of no use winning unless there be a *galerie* to look on and applaud.'

And then he felt ashamed of the poorness and triviality of the thought, which was not one he would have expressed to his wife. That very morning, when she had read a long flattery of herself in a journal of fashion, she had cast the sheet from her with disgust on every line of her face.

'We are safe from *that*, at least, in the Iselthal,' she had said. 'Cannot you make them understand that we are not public artists to need *réclames*, nor yet sovereigns to be compelled to submit to the microscope? Is

this the meaning of civilisation—to make privacy impossible, to oblige every one to live under a lens?'

He had affected to agree with her, but in his heart he had not done so. He liked the fumes of the incense. So did his child.

'They will put this in the papers!' said Bela, when the snow came and he had his sledge out for the first time with four little Hungarian ponies.

'That is the poison of cities!' said Wanda, as she heard him. 'Who can have been so foolish as to tell him of the papers?'

'Your heir, my dear, will never want for reporters of any flattery,' said his father. 'It is as well he should run the gauntlet of them early.'

Bela listened, and said to his brother a little later: 'I like Paris. Paris prints everything we do, and the people read the print, and then they want to see us.'

'What good is that?' said Gela. 'I like home. They all of them *know* us; they don't want to *see* us. That is much better.'

'No, it isn't,' said Bela. 'One drives all day long at home, and there is nothing but the trees; here the trees are all people, and the people talk of us, and the people want to *be* us.'

'But they love us at home,' said Gela.

'That does not matter,' said Bela with hauteur.

Wanda called the children to her.

'Bela,' she said gently, 'do you know that once, not so very long ago, there was a little boy here in Paris very much like you, with golden hair and velvet coat like yours, and he was called the Dauphin, and when he went out with his servants, as you do, the people envied him, and talked of him, and put in print what he did each day? The people wanted to *be* him, as you say, but they did not love him—poor little child!—because they envied him so. And in a very little while—a very, very little while—because it was envy and not love, they put the Dauphin in prison, and they cut off his golden hair, and gave him nothing but bread and water and filthy straw, and locked him up all alone till he died. That is the use of being envied in Paris—or anywhere else. Gela is right. It is better when people love us.'

The next day, as Bela drove in his sledge down the white avenues through the staring crowds, his little fair face was very grave under its curls; he thought of the Dauphin.

When the weather opened, Wanda took him and his brother to Versailles and Trianon, and told them more of that saddest of all

earthly histories of fallen greatness. Gela sobbed aloud; Bela was silent and grew pale.

'I hate Paris,' he said very slowly, as they went back to it in the red close of the wintry afternoon.

'Do not hate Paris. Do not hate anything or anyone,' said his mother softly; 'but love your own home and your own people, and be grateful for them.'

Bela lifted his little cap and made the sign of the Cross, as he did when he saw anything holy. 'I am the Dauphin at home,' he thought; and he felt the tears in his eyes, though he never would cry as Gela did.

So she gave them her simples as antidotes to the city's poison, and occupied herself with her children, with the poor around her, with the various details of her distant estates, and paid but little heed to that artificial world which, when she heeded it, offended and irritated her. To please Sabran she went to a few great houses and to the opera, and gave many entertainments herself, happy that he was happy in it, but not otherwise interested in the life around her, or moved by the homage of it.

'It is much more my jewels than it is myself that they stare at,' she assured him, when he told her of the admiration which she elicited wherever she appeared. 'Believe me,

if you put my pearls or my diamonds on Mdme. Chose or Baroness Niemand, they would gather and gaze quite as much.'

He laughed.

'Last night I think you wore no ornaments except a few tea-roses, and I saw them follow you just the same. It is very odd that you never seem to understand that you are a beautiful woman.'

'I am glad to be so in your eyes, if I never shall be in my own. As for that popularity of society, it never commended itself to me. It has too strong a savour of the mob.'

'When you are so proud to the world why are you so humble to me?'

She was silent a moment, then said:

'I think when one loves any other very much, one becomes for him altogether unlike what one is to the world. As for being proud, I have never fairly made out whether my pride is humility or my humility pride, and none of my confessors have ever been able to tell me. I assure you I have searched my heart in vain.'

A shadow passed over his face; he thought that there even would be pride enough to send him out for ever from her side if she knew——

One day she suggested to him that he should visit Romaris.

'Now you are near for so long a time, surely you should go,' she urged. 'It is not well never to see your poor people. The priest is a good man, indeed; but he cannot altogether make up for your absence.'

He answered with some irritation that they were not his people. All the land had been parcelled out, and nothing remained to the name of Sabran except a strip of the sea-shore and one old half ruined tower: he could not see that he had any duties or obligations there. She did not insist, because she never pursued a theme which appeared unwelcome; but in herself she wondered at the dislike which was in him towards his Breton hamlet, wondered that he did not wish one of his sons to bear its title, wondered that he did not desire the children to see once, at least, the sea-nest of his forefathers. It was more effort to her than usual to restrain herself from pressing questions upon him. But she did forbear; and as a consolation to her conscience sent to the Curé of Romaris a sum of money for the poor, which was so large that it astounded and bewildered the holy man by the weight of responsibility it laid on him.

The indifference shocked her the more because of the profound conviction, in which she had been reared, of the duties of the noble to

his poorer brethren, and the ties of mutual affection which bound together her and her people's interests.

'The weapon of our order against the Socialist is duty,' she had once said to him.

He, more sceptical, had told her that no weapon, not even that anointed one, can turn aside the devilish hate of envy. But she held to her creed, and strove to rear her children in its tenets. It always seemed to her that the Cross before which the fiend shrinks cowering in 'Faust' is but a symbol of the power of a noble life to force even hatred to its knees.

She did not care for this season in Paris, but she did not let him perceive any dissatisfaction in her. She made her own interests out of the arts and charity; she bought the Hôtel Noira, and left everything as the Duc had left it; she found pleasure in intercourse with her royal exiled friends, and left her husband his own entire liberty of action.

'Are you never jealous?' said her royal friend to her once. 'He is so much liked—so much made love to—I wonder you are not jealous!'

'I?' she echoed: and it seemed to her friend as if in that one pronoun she had said volumes. 'Jealous!'

She repeated the word as she drove home

alone that day, and almost wondered what it meant. Who could be to him what she was? Who could dethrone her from that 'great white throne' to which his adoration had raised her? If his senses ever strayed, his soul would never swerve from its loyalty.

When she reached home that afternoon she found a card, on which was written with a pencil, in German:

'So sorry not to find you. I am in Paris to see my doctor. Zdenka has taken my service at Court. I will come to you to-morrow.'

The card was Mdme. Brancka's.

CHAPTER XXX.

SABRAN, that same afternoon, as he had walked down the Rue de la Paix, had been signalled and stopped by a pretty woman wrapped to the eyes in blue fox furs, who was being driven in a low carriage by Hungarian horses, glorious in silver chains and trappings.

'My dear Réné,' had cried Mdme. Olga, 'do you not know me, that you compel me to flourish my parasol? Yes: I am come to Paris. My sister-in-law, Zdenka, will do my waiting. I wanted to consult my physician; I am very unwell, though you look so incredulous. So Wanda has all the Noira collection? What a fortunate woman she is. The eighteenth century is the least suited to her taste. She will heartily despise all those shepherdesses *en*

panier and those smiling deities on lacquer. How could the Duc leave such frivolities to so serious a person? What is her doubled rose-leaf amidst all her good luck? She must have one. I suppose it is you? Well, you will find me at home in an hour. I am only a stone's throw from your hotel. Have you brought all the homespun virtues with you from Hohenszalras? I am afraid they will wither in the air of the boulevards. *Au revoir!*'

And then she had laughed again and kissed her finger-tips to him, and driven away wrapped up in her shining furs, and he was conscious of a stinging sense of excitement, annoyance, pleasure, and confusion, as if he had drunk some irritant and heady wine.

He had gone on to his clubs with an uneasy sense of something perilous and distasteful having come into his life, yet also with a consciousness of a certain zest added to the seductions of this his favourite city. He did not go to the Hôtel Brancka in the next hour, and was sensible of having to exercise a certain control over himself to refrain from doing so.

'Did you know that Olga was in Paris?' she said, in some surprise, to him when they met in the evening.

'I believe she arrived this morning,' he

answered, with a certain effort. 'I met her an hour or two ago. She came unexpectedly; she had not even told her servants to open her hotel.'

'Is Stefan with her?'

'I believe not.'

'But surely it is her term of waiting in Vienna?'

He gave a gesture of indifference.

'I believed it was. I think it was. She will be sure to write to you this evening, so she said. We cannot escape her, you see; she is our fate.'

'We can go back to Hohenszalras.'

'That would be too absurd. We cannot spend our lives running away from Mdme. Brancka. We have a hundred engagements here. Besides, your Noira affair is not one half settled as yet, and it is only now that Paris is really agreeable. We will go back in May, after Chantilly.'

'As you like,' she said, with a smile of ready acquiescence.

She was only there for his sake. She would not spoil his contentment by showing that she made a sacrifice. She was never really happy away from her mountains, but she did not wish him to suspect that.

The Hôtel Brancka was a charming little

temple of luxury, ordered after the last mode, and as *pimpant* as its mistress. It had cost enormous sums of money, and its walls had been painted by famous artists with fantastic and voluptuous subjects, which had not been paid for at the present.

In finance, indeed, she was much like a king of recent time, who never had any money to give, but always said to his mistresses, 'Order whatever you like; the Civil List will always pay my bills.' She had never any money, but she knew that her brother-in-law, like the king's ministers, would always pay her bills.

'One expects to hear the "Decamerone" read here,' said Wanda, with some disdain, as she glanced around her on her first visit.

'At Hohenszalras one would never dare to read anything but the "Imitationis Christi,"' said Mdme. Olga, with contempt of another sort.

The little hotel was but a few streets distance off their own grand and spacious residence, which had undergone scarcely any change since the days of Louis XV. They saw the Countess Brancka very often, could not choose but see her when she chose, and that was almost perpetually.

He had honestly, and even intensely, desired not to be subjected to her vicinity.

But it was difficult to resist its seduction when she lived within a few yards of him, when she met him at every turn, when the changing scenes of society were like those of a kaleidoscope, always composed of the same pieces. The closeness of her relationship to his wife made an avoidance of her, which would have been easy with a mere acquaintance, wholly out of possibility. She pleaded her 'poverty' very prettily, as a plea to borrow their riding-horses, use their boxes at the Opera and the Théâtre Français, and be constantly, under one pretext or another, seeking their advice. Wanda, who knew the enormous extravagance of both the Branckas, and the inroads which their debts made on even the magnificent fortunes of Egon Vàsàrhely, had not as much patience as usual in her before these plaintive pretences.

'*Wanda me boude*,' said Mdme. Brancka, with touching reproachfulness, and sought a refuge and a confidant in the sympathy of Sabran, which was not given very cordially, yet could not be altogether refused. Not only were they in the same world, but she made a thousand claims on their friendship, on their relationship. Stefan Brancka was in Hungary. She wanted Sabran's advice about her horses, about her tradespeople, about her disputes

with the artists who had decorated her house; she sent for him without ceremony, and, with insistence, made him ride with her, drive with her, dance with her, made him take her to see certain diversions which were not wholly fitted for a woman of her rank, and so rapidly and imperceptibly gained ascendency over him that before making any engagement he involuntarily paused to learn whether she had any claim on his time. It caused his wife the same vague impatience which she had felt when Olga Brancka had persisted in going out with him on hunting excursions at home. But she thrust away her observation of it as unworthy of her.

'If she tire him,' she thought, 'he will very soon put her aside.'

But he did not do so.

Once she said to him, with a little irony, 'You do not dislike Olga so very much now?' and to her surprise he coloured and answered quickly, 'I am not sure that I do not hate her.'

'She certainly does not hate you,' said Wanda, a little contemptuously.

'Who knows?' he said gloomily; 'who could ever be sure of anything with a woman like that?'

'Mutability has a charm for some persons,' said his wife, with an irritation for which she despised herself.

'Not for me,' said Sabran, quickly. 'My opinion of Mdme. Olga is precisely what it has always been.'

'Are you very sincere to her, then?' said Wanda, and as she spoke, regretted it. What was Olga Brancka that she should for a moment bring any shadow of dissension between them?

'Sincere!' he echoed, with a certain embarrassment. 'Who would she expect to be so? I told you once before that you pay her in a coin of which she could not decipher the superscription!'

Wanda smiled, but she was pained by his tone. 'You are not the first man, I suppose, who amuses himself with what he despises,' she answered. 'But I do not think it is a very noble sport, or a very healthy one. Forgive me, dear, if I seem to preach to you.'

'Preach on for ever, my beloved divine. You can never weary me,' said Sabran, and he stooped and kissed her.

She did not return his caress.

That day as she drove with the Princess in the Bois, Bela and Gela facing her, she saw

him in the side alley riding with the Countess Brancka. A physical pain seemed to contract her heart for a moment.

'Olga is very *accaparante*,' said the Princess, perceiving them also. 'Not content with borrowing your Arabs, she must have your husband also as her cavalier.'

'If she amuse him I am her debtor,' said Wanda, very calmly.

'Amuse! Can a man who has lived with you be amused by her?'

'I am not amusing,' said his wife, with a smile which was not mirthful. 'Men are like Bela and Gela; they cannot always be serious.'

Then she told her coachman to leave the Bois and drive out into the country. She did not care to meet those riders at every turn in the avenues.

'My dear Réné,' said the Princess, when she happened to see him alone. 'Can you find no one in all Paris to divert yourself with except Stefan Brancka's wife? I thought you disliked her.'

Sabran hesitated.

'She is related to us,' he said a little feebly. 'One sees her of necessity a hundred times a week.'

'For our misfortune,' said the Princess, sententiously. 'But she is not altogether friend-

less in Paris. Can she find no one but you to ride with her?'

'Has Wanda been complaining to you?'

'My dear Marquis,' replied Mdme. Ottilie, with dignity. 'Your wife is not a person to complain; you must understand her singularly little after all, if you suppose that. But I think, if you would calculate the hours you have of late passed in Mdme. Brancka's society, you would be surprised to see how large a sum they make up of your time. It is not for me to presume to dictate to you; you are your own master, of course: only I do not think that Olga Brancka, whom I have known from her childhood, is worth a single half-hour's annoyance to Wanda.'

Sabran rose, and his lips parted to speak, but he hesitated what to say, and the Princess, who was not without tact, left him to receive herself some sisters of S. Vincent de Paul. His conscience was not wholly clear. He was conscious of a pungent, irresistible, even whilst undesired, attraction that this Russian woman possessed for him; it was something of the same potent yet detestable influence which Cochonette had exercised over him. Olga Brancka had the secret of amusing men and of exciting their baser natures; she had a trick of talk which sparkled like wine, and, without being actually

wit, illumined and diverted her companions. She was a mistress of all the arts of provocation, and had a cruel power of making all scruples of conscience and all honesties and gravities of purpose seem absurd. She made no disguise of her admiration of Sabran, and conveyed the sense of it in a thousand delicate and subtle modes of flattery. He read her very accurately, and had neither esteem nor regard for her, and yet she had an attraction for him. Her boudoir, all wadded softly with golden satin like a jewel-box, with its perpetual odour of roses and its faint light coloured like the roses, was a little temple of all the graces, in which men were neither wise nor calm. She had a power of turning their very souls inside out like a glove, and after she had done so they were never worth quite as much again. The fascination which Sabran possessed for her was that he never gave up his soul to her as the others did; he was always beyond her reach; she was always conscious that she was shut out from his inmost thoughts.

The sort of passion she had conceived for him grew, because it was fanned by many things—by his constancy to his wife, by his personal beauty, by her vague enmity to Wanda, by the sense of guilt and of indecency which would attach in the world's sight to such a

passion. Her palate in pleasure was at once hardened and fastidious; it required strong food, and her audacity in search of it was not easily daunted. She knew, too, that he had some secret which his wife did not share; she was resolved to penetrate it. She had tried all other means; there only now remained one—to surprise or to beguile it from himself. To this end, cautious and patient as a cat, she had resumed her intimacy with them as relations, and with all the delicate arts of which she was a proficient, strove to make her companionship agreeable and necessary to him. Before long he became sensible of a certain unwholesome charm in her society. He went with her to the opera, he took her to pass hours amidst the Noira collection, he rode with her often; now and then he dined with her alone, or almost alone, in a small oval room of pure Japanese, where great silvery birds and white lilies seemed to float on a golden field, and the dishes were silver lotus leaves, and the lamps burned in pale green translucent gourds hanging on silver stalks.

An artificial woman is nothing without her *mise en scène*; transplanted amidst natural landscape and out-of-door life she is apt to become either ridiculous or tiresome. Mdme. Brancka in Paris was in her own playhouse; she looked well, and was in her own manner irresistible.

At Hohenszalras she had been as out of keeping with all her atmosphere as her enamel buttons, her jewelled alpenstock, her cravat of pointe d'Alençon, and her softly-tinted cheeks had been out of place in the drenching rain-storms and mountain-winds of the Archduchy of Austria.

He knew very well that the attraction she possessed for him was of no higher sort than that which the theatre had; he seemed to be always present at a perfect comedy played with exquisite grace amidst unusually perfect decorations. But there was a certain artificial bias in his own temperament which made him at home there. His whole life after all had been an actor's. His wife had said rightly: 'Men cannot be always serious.' It was just his idler, falser moods which Olga Brancka suited, and his very fear of her gave a thrill of greater power to his amusement. When the Princess, his devoted friend, reproved him, he was unpleasantly aroused from his unwise indulgence in a perilous pursuit. To pain his wife would be to commit a monstrous crime, a crime of blackest ingratitude. He knew that; he was ever alive to the enormity of his debt to her, he was for ever dissatisfied with himself for being unable to become more worthy of her.

'She jealous!' he thought. It seemed to

him impossible, yet his vanity could not repress a throb of exultation; it almost seemed to him that in making her more human it would make her more near his level. Jealous! It was not a word which was in any keeping with her; jealousy was a wild, coarse, undisciplined, suspicious passion, far removed from the calmness and the strength of her nature.

At that moment she entered the room, coming from a drive in the forenoon. It was still cold. She had a cloak of black sables reaching to her feet; it still rested on her shoulders. Her head was uncovered; she had never looked taller, fairer, more stately; the black furs seemed like some northern robes of coronation. Beneath them gleamed the great gold clasps of a belt, and gold lions' heads fastening her olive velvet gown.

'Jealous!' he thought, 'this queen amongst women!' His heart sank. 'She would never say anything,' he thought; 'she would leave me.' Almost he expected her to divine his thoughts. He was relieved when she spoke to him of some mere trifle of the day. Like many men he could not be frank, because frankness would have seemed like insult to his wife. He could not explain to her the mingled aversion and attraction which Olga Brancka possessed for him, the curious stinging irritation which

she produced on his nerves and his senses, so that he despised her, disliked her, and yet could not wholly resist the charm of her unwholesome magic. How could he say this to his wife? How could he hope to make her understand, or if she understood, persuade her not to resent as the bitterest of affronts this power which another woman, and that woman nearly connected with her, possessed? Besides, even if he went so far, if he leaned so much on the nobility of her nature as to venture to do this, he knew very well that she would in reason say to him, 'Let us go away from where this danger exists.' He did not desire to go away. He was glad of this old life of pleasure, which let him forget his secret sorrow. Amidst the excitations of Paris he could push away the remembrance that another man knew the shame of his life. The calm and the solitude of Hohenszalras, which had been delightful to him once, had grown irksome when he had begun to cling to them for fear lest any other should remember as Vàsàrhely had remembered. Here in Paris, where he had always been popular, admired, well known, he was as it were in his own kingdom, and the magnificence with which he could now live there brought him troops of friends. He hoped that his wife would not be unwilling to pass a season there in every year,

and he stifled as it rose his consciousness that she would assent to whatever he wished, however painful or unwelcome to herself.

'It is really very unwholesome for you to be married to such a saint as Wanda,' his tormentor said to him one day. 'You do not know what a little opposition and contradiction would do for you.'

They were visiting the Hôtel Noira, studying the probable effects of a new method of lighting the gallery which he contemplated, and she continued abruptly:

'Wanda has been buying very largely in Paris, has she not? And she has bought this hotel of the Noira heirs, I believe? You mean to keep it altogether as it is; and of course you will come and live in it?'

'Whenever she pleases,' he answered, intent on a Lancret not well hung.

'Whenever you please,' said Mdme. Brancka. 'Why will you pretend that Wanda has any separate will of her own? It is marvellous to see so resolute a person as she was as obediently bent as a willow-wand. But all this French property will constitute quite a fortune apart. I suppose it will all be settled on your third son, as Gela is to have Idrac? Will not you give him your title? Count Victor de

Sabran will sound very pretty, and you might rebuild Romaris.'

He turned from her with impatience.

'Are we so very old that you want to parcel out our succession amongst babies? No; I do not intend to give my name to any of Wanda's children. There is an Imperial permission for them all to bear hers.'

'You are not very loyal to your forefathers,' said Mdme. Brancka. 'Wanda might well spare them one of her boys. If not, what is the use of accumulating all this property in France?'

'All that she buys is done out of respect for the Duc de Noira,' said Sabran, curtly. 'If she bear me twenty sons they will all have her name. It was settled so on the marriage-deeds and ratified by the Kaiser.'

'Are prince-consorts always deposed from any throne they have of their own?' said Mdme. Olga, in the tone that he hated. 'If I were you I should rebuild Romaris. I wonder so devoted a wife has not done so years ago.'

'There is nothing at Romaris to rebuild.'

'Decidedly,' thought his companion, 'he hates Romaris, and has no love of his own race. Did he drown Vassia Kazán in the sea there?'

Unsparingly she renewed the subject to Wanda herself.

'You should settle the French properties on little Victor, and give him the Sabran title,' she urged to her. 'I told Réné the other day that I thought it very strange he should not care to have one of his sons named after him.'

Wanda answered coldly enough: 'In my will, if I die before him, everything goes to the Marquis de Sabran. He will make what division he pleases between his children, subject of course to Bela's rights of primogeniture.'

Mdme. Brancka was silent for a moment from surprise.

'It is odd that he should not care for Romaris,' she said, after a long pause. 'You have much more trust in him, Wanda, than it is wise to put in any man that lives.'

'Whom one trusts with oneself, one may well trust with everything else,' said her sister-in-law in a tone which closed discussion. But when she was left alone the thorn remained in her. She thought with perplexity:

'No, he does not care for Romaris. He dislikes its very name. He would never hear of one of the children bearing it. There must be something he does not say.'

She remembered sadly what the Duc de Noira had once said to her:

'In morals as in metals, my dear, you cannot work gold without supporting it by alloy.'

Mdme. Brancka had patience and skill perfect enough to refrain altogether from those hints and tentatives by which a less clever woman would have attempted to approach and surprise the key to those hidden facts which she believed to be the theme of his correspondence with Vàsàrhely and the cause of his rejection of the Russian appointment. A less clever woman would have alarmed him, and betrayed herself by perpetual allusions to the matter. But she never did this: she treated him with an alternation of subtle compliment and ironical malice, such as was most certain to allure and perplex any man, and he never by the most distant suspicion imagined that she knew anything which he desired unknown. She was a woman of strong nerve, and her equanimity in his and his wife's presence was wholly undisturbed by her consciousness that she had dispatched the anonymous suggestion as a seed of discord to Hohenszalras. She knew indeed that it was not what people of her rank and breeding did do, that it was not honest warfare, that it was what even the very easy morality of her own world would have condemned with disgust; but she bore the sin of it very lightly. If she had been driven to excuse it, she would have characterised it as mere mischief. If her sister-in-law had shown her the letter, she would

have glanced over it with a tranquil face and an air of utter unconcern. If she could not have done this sort of thing she would have thought herself a very poor creature. 'I believe you could be as wicked as the Scotch Lady Macbeth,' Stefan Brancka had said once to her; and she had answered with much contempt: 'At least I promise you I should not walk in my sleep if I were so. Your Lady Macbeth was a grotesque barbarian.'

A great deal of the sin of this world, which is not at all like Lady Macbeth's, comes from the want of excitement felt by persons, only too numerous, who have exhausted excitement in its usual shapes. She had done so; she required what was detestable to arouse her, because she had lived at such high pressure that any healthy diversion was vapid and stupid to her. The destruction, if she could achieve it, of her sister-in-law's happiness, offered her in prospect such an excitement; and the whim she had taken for passion grew out of waywardness till it nearly became passion in truth. She never precisely weighed or considered its possible consequences, but she endeavoured to arouse a response in him with all the unscrupulous skill of a mistress in coquetry. When moved by Mdme. Ottilie's warning he strove honestly to avoid her, and often excused him-

self from obedience to her summons, the opposition only stimulated her endeavours, and made a smarting mortification and anger against him supply a double motor-power for his subjection. If she could have believed that she succeeded in making his wife anxious, she might have been content; but Wanda always received her with the same serenity and courtesy, which, if it covered disdain, covered it unimpeachably with admirable grace.

'If one broke her heart, she would only make one a grand courtesy with a bland smile,' thought Olga Brancka, irritably and impatiently. 'There are people who die standing. Wanda would do that.'

That ill weeds grow apace is a true old saw, never truer than of vindictive and envious passions. Sheer and causeless jealousy of her sister-in-law had been alive in her many years, and now, by being fed and unresisted, so grew that it became almost a restless hatred. It was far more her enmity to his wife than any other sentiment which inspired her with a fantastic and unhealthy desire to attract and detach Sabran from his allegiance. Joined to it now there was a sense of some mystery in him that baffled her, and which was to such a woman the most pungent of all stimulants. In all her *câlineries* and all her railleries she never lost sight of this

one purpose, of surprising from him the secret which she believed existed. But he was always on his guard with her; even when most influenced by her atmosphere and her magnetism he did not once lose his self-control and his habitual coolness. At moments when she was most nearly triumphing, the remembrance of his wife came over him like a breath of sweet pure air that passes through a hothouse, and restored him to self-possession and to loyalty. She began to fear that all the ability with which she had procured her exemption from Court duties, and had induced her husband to remain in Vienna, was all vain, and she grew bolder and more reckless in her use of stratagems and solicitations to keep Sabran beside her in these early spring days given over to racing and sporting, and at all the evening entertainments at which the great world met, and whither she carried with so much effect her gleaming sapphires and her black pearls.

'Black pearls argue a perverted taste,' said the Princess Ottilie once to her, and she unabashed answered:

'It is perverted tastes that make any noise in the world or possess any flavour. White pearls are much more beautiful, no doubt, but then they are everywhere, from the Crown jewel-cases to the peasant's necks; but my

black pearls! you cannot find their match—and how white one's throat looks with them. I only want a green rose.'

'Chemicals can supply any deformity,' said the Princess, drily. 'Doing so is called science, I believe.'

'Do you call me a deformity?' she asked, with some annoyance.

'You are an elaborate production of the laboratory,' said the Princess, calmly. 'I am sure you will admit yourself that nature has had very little to do with you.'

'My pearls are black by a freak of nature,' said Mdme. Olga. 'Perhaps I am the same.'

The Princess made a little gesture signifying that politeness forbade her from assent, but she thought: 'Yes; you were never a white pearl, but you have steeped yourself in acids and solutions of all degrees of poison till you are darker than you need have been, and you think your darkness light, and some men think so too.'

Sabran had grown to look for that necklace of black pearls with eagerness in the society to which they both belonged. Few evenings found him where Mdme. Brancka was not. She had known his Paris of the Second Empire; she had known Compiègne and Pierrefonds as he had known them; she knew all the friendships

and the bywords of his old life, and all the *dessous des cartes* of that which was now around them. She amused him. She comprehended all he said, half uttered. She remembered all he recalled. At Hohenszalras he had not found any charm in this, but here he did find one. She suited Paris; she knew it profoundly, she liked all its pastimes, she understood all its sports and all its slang. She hunted at Chantilly, betted at La Marche, plunged at bâccara, shot and fenced well and gaily, had the theatres and all their jargon at her fingers' ends; all this made her no mean aspirant to the post of mistress of his thoughts. All which had seemed tiresome, artificial, even ridiculous, amidst the grand forests and healthful air of the Iselthal became in Paris agreeable and even bewitching. Once he said almost angrily to his wife:

'You, who ride so superbly, should surely show yourself at the Duc's hunts. What is the use of long gallops in the Bois before anyone else is out of bed?'

'I never rode for show yet,' said Wanda, in surprise. 'And you know I never would join in any sort of chase.'

'Surely such humanitarianism is exaggeration,' he said impatiently. 'Olga Brancka rides every day they meet at Chantilly, and she is by no means of your form in the saddle.'

'I have never yet imitated Olga,' said his wife, a little coldly; but she did not object when day after day her finest horses were lent to Mdme. Brancka. She never by a word or a hint reminded him that he was not absolute master of all which belonged to her. Only when her sister-in-law wanted to take Bela and his pony to Chantilly, she made her will strongly felt in refusal.

The child, whose fancy had been fired by what he had heard of the ducal hunting, of the great hounds and the stately gatherings, like pictures of the Valois time, was passionately angered at being forbidden to go, and made his mother's heart ache with his flashing eyes and his flaming cheeks. 'Cannot she leave even the children alone?' she thought, with more bitterness than she had ever felt against anyone.

A few nights later they were both at the Grand Opéra, in the box which was allotted to the name of the Countess von Szalras. She was herself not very well; she was pale, she sat a little away from the light. Her gown was of white velvet; she had no ornament except a cluster of gardenias and stephanotis, and her habitual necklace of pearls. Olga Brancka, in a costume of many shaded reds, marvellously embroidered in gold cords, was as gorgeous as a

tropical bird, and sat with her arms upon the front of the box, playing with a fan of red feathers, or looking through her glass round the house. He talked most with her, but he looked most at his wife. There was no woman, in a full and brilliant house, who could compare with her. A thrill of the pride of possession passed through him. The malicious eyes of the other, glancing towards him over her shoulder, read his thoughts. She smiled provokingly.

'*Le mari amoureux!*' she murmured. 'Really I did not believe in the existence of that type. But it is quite admirable that it should exist. Its example is very much wanted in Paris.'

He felt himself colour like a youth, but it was with irritation; he was at a loss for an answer. To have defended his admiration of his wife at the sword's point would have been easy; to defend it from a woman's ridicule was more difficult. Wanda did not hear; she was listening to the song of Dinorah, and was dreamily regretting the solitude of Hohenszalras, and thinking of what pleasure it would be to return. All the news that Greswold and her stewards sent her thence was precious to her; no details seemed to her insignificant or without interest; and her own letters in return were full of minute attention to the welfare of everyone and of everything she had left there. She

was roused from her home reverie by the voice of her sister-in-law, raised more highly and saying impatiently :

'Why should you object, Réné, when I say that I wish it ?'

'What do you wish ?' said Wanda, who always felt a singular annoyance whenever she heard him thus familiarly addressed. 'Whatever you may wish, I am sure M. de Sabran can require no second bidding to procure it for you, if it be within the limits of the possible.'

'I wish to see a Breton Pardon,' said Olga Brancka, with a gesture of her fan towards the stage. 'There is one next week in his own country; I want him to invite me—us—to Romaris.'

Wanda, who knew that he always shrank from the mention of Romaris, interposed to save him from persecution.

'There is nothing at Romaris to invite us to,' she said for him. 'Neither you nor I can live in a cabin or a fishing-boat; especially can we not in March weather.'

'You can live in a hut on your Alps,' returned the other, 'and I do not dislike tent life in the Karpathians. If he sent his major-domo down, he would soon make the sands and rocks blossom like the rose, and villages would arise as fast as they did before the great Katherine.

Why not? It would be charming. Has he no feeling for the cradle of his ancestors? We must put him through a course of Lamartine.'

'An unfortunate allusion; he lived to lose Milly,' said Sabran, finding himself forced to say something. 'In midsummer, Mesdames, you might perhaps rough it, *tant bien que mal*; but now!—there is nothing to be seen except fog and surf at sea, and mud and pools inland. Even a Pardon would not reconcile you; not even the Breton jackets with scriptural stories embroidered on them, nor the bagpipes.'

'Positively, you will not take us?'

'I must disobey even your wishes in the Ides of March.'

'But whether in March or July—why do you never go yourself?'

'There is nothing to go there for,' he answered, almost losing his patience; 'a people to whom I am only a name, a strip of shore on which I only own a few wind-tormented oak-trees!'

'Only imagine the duties that Wanda would evolve in your place out of those people and those oaks!'

'I have not Wanda's virtues,' he said, half sadly, half jestingly.

'We have none of us, or the Millennium would have arrived. I cannot understand your

dislike to your melancholy sea-shore. Most of your countrymen are for ever home-sick away from their *landes* and their *dolmen*. You seem to feel no throb for the *mater patria*, even when listening to Dinorah, which sets every other Breton's heart beating.'

'My heart is Austrian,' said Sabran, with a bow towards his wife.

'That is very pretty, and what you are also obliged to say,' interrupted Madame Brancka. 'But why hate Romaris? For my part, I believe you see ghosts there.'

His wife said, with a quick reproach in her words: 'The ghosts of men who knew how to live and to die nobly? He would not be afraid to meet them.'

The simplicity of the words and the trustfulness of them sank into his soul. A pang of terrible consciousness went through him like poisoned steel. As his wife's eyes sought his the lights swam round with him, the music was only a confused murmur on his ear; he heard as if from afar off the voice of Olga Brancka saying: 'My dear Wanda, you are always so exalted!'

At that moment some one knocked at the door: he was glad to rise and open it to admit Count Kaulnitz and two other gentlemen.

Hardly anything else which his wife could

have said would have hurt him quite so much.

As he sat there in the brilliant illumination and the hot-house warmth, with her delicate profile clear as a cameo against the light, a sensation of physical cold passed through him. He saw himself as he was, an actor, a traitor, a perjured and dishonoured man. What right had he there more than any galley-slave at the hulks?—he, Vassia Kazán?

Well tutored by the ways of the world, he laughed, and spoke, and criticised the rendering of the opera with his usual readiness of grace; but Olga Brancka had marked the fleeting expression of his face, and said to herself: 'Whatever the secret be, the key of it lies in the sands of Romaris.'

As she took his arm, when they left the box, she murmured to him: 'I shall go to Romaris, and you will take me.'

'I think not,' he said curtly, without his usual suavity. 'I am the servant of all your sex, it is true, but like all servants I am only willing to be commanded by my mistress.'

'O most faithful of lovers, I understand!' she said, with a contemptuous laugh. 'And she never commands you, she only obeys. You are very fortunate, even though you do have ghosts at your ruined tower by the sea.'

'Yes, I am fortunate, indeed,' he answered gravely, and his eyes glanced towards his wife, who was standing a stair or two below conversing with her cousin Kaulnitz.

'Even though you had to abandon Russia,' murmured Olga Brancka, dreamily. She could feel that a certain thrill passed through him. He was startled and alarmed. Was it possible that Egon Vàsàrhely had betrayed him?

'Paris is much more agreeable than St. Petersburg,' he answered carelessly. 'I am no loser. Wanda would have been unhappy, and, what would have been worse, she would never have said so.'

'No, she would never have said so. She is like the Sioux, the Stoics, and the people who died in lace ruffles in '89. I beg your pardon, those are your people, I forgot; the people whose ghosts forbid you to entertain us at Romaris.'

'I would brave an army of ghosts to please Mdme. Brancka,' said Sabran, with his usual gallantry.

'Call me *Cousinette*, at the least,' she murmured, as they descended the last stair.

'*Bon soir*, madame!' he said, as he closed the door of her carriage.

'Are you coming with me?' said Wanda, as she went to hers.

He hesitated. 'I think I will go for an hour to the clubs,' he answered. He kissed her hand. As he drew the fur rug over her skirts, she thought his face was very pale as she saw it by the lamplight. She wished to ask him if he were quite well, but she restrained herself, knowing how intolerable such importunities are to men. Instead, she smiled at him, as she said, '*Amusez-vous bien*,' and left him to divert himself as he chose.

'How little women understand men, and how poorly they love them when they do not leave them alone!' she thought, as her carriage rolled homeward. She never troubled him, never interrogated him, never even tried to conjecture what he did when away from her. Sometimes, when he returned at sunrise, she had already risen, and had said a prayer with her children, written her letters, or visited her horses, but she always met him with a smile and without a question.

It hurt her with an ever-deepening wound to perceive the attraction which Olga Brancka possessed for him. She did not for a moment believe that it was love, but she saw that it was an influence which had audacity enough to compete with her own, a sort of fascination which, commencing with dislike, increased to an unhealthy and morbid potency. She could not

bring herself to speak of it to him. She was not one of those women who reproach and implore. It would have seemed to her as if both he and she would have lost all dignity in each other's sight if once they had stooped to what society calls jestingly 'a scene.' He guessed aright that if she had really believed herself displaced in his heart she would have left him without a word. She was too conscious of his entire worship of her to be moved to anything like that jealous passion which would have seemed to her the last depths of humiliation; but she was pained, fretted, stirred to a scornful wonder by the power this frivolous woman possessed of usurping his time and giving colour to his thoughts.

It hurt her to think he feared her too much to tell her of any trouble, any folly, any memory. She reproached herself with having perhaps alienated his confidence by the gravity of her temper, the seriousness of her opinions. It would be hard to think that frivolous shallow women could inspire men with more confidence than a deeper nature could do, but perhaps it might be so. He had sometimes said to her, half jestingly: 'You should dwell among the angels; the human world is unfit for you!' Was it that which alarmed him?

With that subtle sense of what is in the air

around which so often makes us aware of what is never spoken in our hearing, she was sensible that the great world in which they lived began to speak of the intimacy between her husband and the wife of her cousin Stefan. She became sensible that the world was in general disposed to resent for her, to pity her, and to censure them, whilst it coupled their names together. The very suspicion brought her an intolerable shame. When she was quite alone, thinking of it, her face burned with angry blushes. No one hinted it to her, no one breathed it to her, no one even expressed it by a glance in her presence; yet she was as well aware of what they were saying as though she had been in a hundred salons when they talked of her.

She knew the character of Olga Brancka, also, too well not to know that her own mortification would be the sweetest triumph for one of whose latent envy she had long been conscious. Ever since she had become the sole owner of the vast fortunes of the Szalras she had felt for ever upon her the evil eye of a foiled covetousness. The other had been very young, and had waited long and patiently, but her hour had now come.

She said nothing to her husband, and she preserved to her cousin's wife the same perfect

courtesy of manner; but in her own soul she began to suffer keenly, more from a sense of littleness in him than any mere personal feeling. To blame him, to entreat him, to seek to detach him—all these things were impossible to her.

'If all our years of union do not hold him, what will?' she thought; and the great natural hauteur of her temper could never have let her bend to the solicitation of a constancy denied to her.

One night, when they had no engagements but a ball, to which they could go at midnight, he did not come in to dinner. Always before, when he had not returned to dine, he had sent her a message to beg her not to wait. This evening there was no message. She and the Princess dined alone.

'He was never discourteous before,' said the Princess, who disliked such omissions.

'It is his own house,' said Wanda. 'He has a right to come or not to come as he likes, without ceremony.'

'There can never be too much ceremony,' said the Princess. 'It preserves amiability, self-respect, and good manners. It is the silver sheath which saves them from friction. It is the distinguishing mark between the gentleman and the boor. When politeness is only for the street or the salon, it is but a poor thing.

He has always been so scrupulous in these matters.'

As Wanda later crossed the head of the grand staircase, to go and dress for the ball, she heard her *maître d'hôtel* in the hall below speak to the groom of the chambers.

'Are the Marquis's horses in, do you know?' asked the former; and the latter answered:

'Yes, hours ago; they are to go for him at the Union at eleven, but they left him at the Hôtel Brancka.'

Then the two officials laughed a little under their breath. Their words and their laughter came upwards distinctly to her ear. Her first impulse was a natural and passionate one of bitter burning pain and wonder. A sensation wholly new to her, of hatred and of impotence combined, seemed to choke her.

'Is this what they call jealousy?' she thought, and the mere thought checked her emotion and changed it to humiliation.

'I—I—contend with her!' she said in her soul. With a blindness before her eyes she retraced her steps, and went to the sleeping-rooms of her children. They were all asleep as they had been for hours. She sat down beside the bed of the little Ottilie, and gazed on the soft flushed loveliness of the child, bright as a rose in the dew.

She kissed the child's cheek without waking her, and sat still there some time in the faint twilight and the perfect silence, only stirred by the light breathing of the sleepers; the repose, the innocence, the silence soothed and tranquillised her.

'What matter a breath of folly?' she thought. 'He is their father; he is my love; we have all our lives to spend together.'

Then she rose and went to her chamber, and had herself clothed in a court dress of white taffetas and white velvet, embroidered with silver lilies.

'Make me look well,' she said to her women. 'Put on all my diamonds.'

When he entered, near midnight, repentant, self-conscious, almost confused, she stopped his excuses with a smile.

'I heard the servants say you dined with my cousin's wife. Why not, if it please you? But I wonder she allows you to dine without *un bout de toilette*. Will you not make haste to dress? We shall be late.'

The words were perfectly simple and kind, but as she spoke them, so royal did she look, standing there in the blaze of her jewels, with her lily-laden train, that he felt abashed, ashamed, angered against himself, yet more angered against his temptress.

The old lines of Marlowe came to his mind and his lips:

> 'O ! thou art fairer than the evening air
> Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.'

'I am not young enough to merit that quotation,' she said, with a smile; 'ten years ago perhaps——'

Her heart contracted as she spoke; she was conscious that she had wished to look well in his eyes that night. The sense that she was stooping to measure weapons with such an opponent as Olga Brancka smote her with a sense of humiliation, which did not leave her throughout the after hours in which she carried her jewels through the gorgeous crowd of the ball at the Austrian Embassy.

'If I lower myself to such a contest as that,' she thought, 'I shall lose all self-respect and all his reverence. I shall seem scarcely to him higher than an importunate mistress.'

Now and again there came to her a passionate anger against himself, a hardening of her heart to him, since he could thus be guilty of this inexcusable and insensate folly. But she would not harbour these; she would not judge him; she would not blame him. Her marriage vows were not mere dead letters to her. She conceived that obedience and silence

were her clearest duties. Only one thing was outside her duty and beyond her force—she could not stoop to rivalry with Olga Brancka.

All at once she took a resolution of which few women would have been capable. She resolved to leave them.

Three days after the ball she said very quietly to him:

'If you do not object, I will go home and take the children. It is time they were at Hohenszalras. Bela, above all, is not improved by what he sees and hears here; his studies are broken and his fancy is excited. In a very little while he would learn quite to despise his country pleasures, and forget all his own people. I will take them home.'

He looked at her quickly in surprise.

'I do not think I can leave Paris immediately,' he said, with hesitation. 'I have many engagements. Of course you can send the children.'

'I said I should go, not you. I long to see my own woods in their first leaf,' she answered, with a smile. 'It will be better for you to remain. No one ought to be allowed to suppose that you are bound to my side. That is neither for your dignity nor mine.'

'Has anyone suggested——' he began, and paused in embarrassment, for he remembered

the incessant taunts and innuendoes of Olga Brancka.

'I do not listen to suggestions of that sort,' she replied tranquilly. 'You wish to remain here, and I wish to return home. We are both at liberty to do what we like. My love, she added, with a grave tenderness in her voice, 'have I so poor an opinion of you that I dare not leave you alone? I think I should hardly care for a fealty which was only to be retained by my constant presence. That is not my ideal.'

He coloured; he was uncertain what to reply: before her he felt unworthy and disloyal. A vast sense of her immeasurable nobility swept over him, and made him conscious of his own unworthiness.

'Whatever you wish, I wish,' he murmured, and was aware that this could not be what she would gladly have heard him say. 'I will follow you soon. Your heart is always in your highlands. I know that you are too grand a creature to be happy in cities. I have the baser leaven in me that is not above them. The forests and the mountains do not say to me all that they do to you.'

'Men want the movement of the world, no doubt,' she said, without showing any trace of disappointment. 'I only care for the subjec-

tive life; I am very German, you see. The woods interest me, and the world does not.'

No more passed between them on the subject, but she gave orders to her people to make arrangements for her departure and her children's in two days' time, and sent out her cards of farewell.

'Do you think you are wise?' the Princess ventured to say to her.

She answered:

'I know what you mean, dear mother; yes, I think so. To struggle for influence with another, and that other Olga! I should indeed despise myself if I could stoop so low. If he miss me he can follow me. If he do not —then he has no need of me.'

'I confess I do not understand you,' said Mdme. Ottilie; 'to surrender so meekly!'

'I surrender nothing,' she said, almost sternly. 'I know what I have seen again and again in society. The woman jealous and anxious, losing ground in his esteem and her own every hour, and rendering alike herself and him actors in a ludicrous comedy for the mockery of the world around them—a world which never has any sympathy for such a [illegible]. Indeed, why should it have? for if the jealousy of a lover be poetic, the jealousy of a wife is only ridiculous. I *am* his wife; I am

not his gaoler. I refuse to admit to others or to him or to myself that any other could be wholly to him what I am; and I should lose that place I hold, lose it in his eyes and my own, if I once admitted my dethronement possible.'

She spoke with more force and anger than was common with her, and her auditor admired while she still failed to comprehend her.

'Is there a more pitiable spectacle,' she continued, 'than that of a wife contending with others for that charm in her husband's sight which no philtres and no prayers can renew when once it has fled for ever? Women are so unwise. Love is like a bird's song—beautiful and eloquent when heard in forest freedom, harsh and worthless in repetition when sung from behind prison bars. You cannot secure love by vigilance, by environment, by captivity. What use is it to keep the person of a man beside you, if his soul be truant from you? You all say that Olga Brancka has power over him. If she have, let her use it and exhaust it, it will not last long; but I will not sink to her level by contesting it with her. For what can you take me?'

In her glance the leonine wrath of the Szalras flashed for a moment; her face was

pale, she paced the room with a hasty and uneven step. The Princess sought a timid refuge in silence. There were certain heights in the nature and impulses of her niece of which she, a dweller on a lower plain, never caught sight. There were times when the haughty reserve and the admirable patience of this stronger character made a union which awed her, and altogether escaped her comprehension.

In two days' time she left Paris, the Princess and the children accompanying her.

He felt his heart misgive him as he let her go. What was Olga Brancka, what was Paris, what was all the world compared to her? As he kissed her hands in farewell before her servants at the *Gare de l'Est*, the impulse came over him to throw himself into the carriage beside her, and return with her to the old, fair, still, peaceful life of Hohenszalras. But he resisted it; he heard in memory the mocking of Olga Brancka's voice saying to him:

'*Ah, quel mari amoureux!*'

He had his establishment, his engagements, his horses, his friends, his wagers; he would seem ridiculous to all Paris if he could not endure a few weeks' separation from his wife. A great banquet at his house was arranged to take place in a few days' time, at which only

great Legitimist nobles would be present, and at which the toast of '*Le Roi!*' would be drunk with solemn honours. What would they say of him if he failed to receive them because he had followed his wife into Austria? With a thousand sophisms he reconciled himself to remaining there without her, and would not face the consciousness within him that the real motive of his staying on through the coming weeks in Paris was that Olga Brancka was there. For herself, she parted with him tenderly, kindly, without any trace of doubt in him or of purpose in her departure.

'You will come when you wish,' were her last words to him. 'You know well, dear, that Hohenszalras without you will seem like a sadly empty eagle's nest.'

All his offences against her were heavy on him as he returned to the great house no longer graced by her presence. He would have given twenty years of his life to have been able to undo what he had done when he had taken a name not his own. He was sensible of great talents in him which might have brought him to renown had he been willing to face hardship and laborious effort. Even as he had been at his birth—even as Vassia Kazán—he might have achieved such eminence as would have made him her equal in honest

honour. But he had won the world and her by a lie, and the act was irrevocable. Chance and circumstance may be controlled or altered, but the fate which men make for themselves always abides with them for good or ill: a spirit either of good or ill which once incarnated by their incantations never departs from them till death.

CHAPTER XXXI.

'ARE you actually left alone?' said Mdme. Olga gaily to him that evening, when they met at an embassy. 'I thought Wanda was an Una, who never let her lion loose?'

'The remembrance of her would recall him if she did,' he answered quickly and coldly. 'She does not believe in chains because she does not need them.'

'Most knightly of men!' she said, with a little laugh. 'It must be very fatiguing to have to play the part you so affect, even in absence. Our metaphors are involved, but your loyalty seems one and indivisible. I suppose you are left on parole?'

The departure of his wife had disconcerted and disappointed her; as he, to realise his

position, had required to have the world about him as spectator of it, so she felt all her triumph over him powerless and pointless if Wanda von Szalras were not there to suffer by the sight of it. He had remained; that was much; but she felt that the absence of his wife had made him colder to herself, that the blank left made a void between them, that remembrance might be more potent with him than vicinity; and his consciousness that he was trusted might have more power than any interference or opposition would have had. She became sensible that she had less charm for him; that he was less easily moved by her mockery and attracted by her wit. His earlier animosity to her still flashed fire now and then, and with this sense of revived resistance in him her own feeling, which had been born of caprice, took giant growth as a passion. She grew cruel in it. If she could only know his secret she thought she would crush him with it, grind him under her foot, torture him. There was a touch of the tigress under her feverish and artificial life.

'*Il faut brusquer la chose*,' she said savagely to herself, when he had been alone in Paris about a fortnight, and each day had convinced her that he grew more wary of her, more unwilling to surrender himself to the fascina-

tion which she exercised upon his baser nature. When she attempted jests at his wife he stopped her sternly, and she felt that she lost ground with him. Yet she had still a power upon him; an unhealthy and fatal power. When he looked at her he thought often of two lines:—

> 'O Venus! shöne Frau meine,
> Ihr seyd eine Teufelinne.'

'Wanda writes to you every day?' she asked once.

'She writes often,' he answered.

'And what does she say of me?'

'Nothing!'

'Nothing? What does she write about? Of the priest's sermons and the horses' coughs, of how much wood has been cut, and how many shoes the children wear, of how she sorrows for you, and says Latin prayers for you twice a day?'

His face darkened.

'Madame my cousin,' he said irritably, 'will you understand that men do not like their religion spoken lightly of? My wife is my religion.'

Then Mdme. Olga laughed with silvery, hysterical laughter, and clapped her hands as if she were applauding a good comedy, and cried shrilly: '*Oh! la bonne blague!*'

But she knew very well that it was not '*blague*.' She knew very well, too, that though he was subjugated by a certain sorcery when in her presence, when absent, his good taste condemned, and his good sense escaped, her. She was one of those women who have a thousand means of usurping a man's time, and are not scrupulous if some of those measures are bold ones. All her admirers tacitly left the field open to one for whom she made no scruple of her preference; and, under pretext of her relationship to him, she contrived many ways to bring him beside her. Every day he said to himself that he would go home on the morrow; but each day bore its diversions, its claims, its interests, and each day found him in Paris, sometimes driving her to the Cascade, to St. Germain, to Versailles, sometimes escorting her to the tribune of a race-course, or a *première* at a theatre, sometimes dining with her in her pretty room, the table strewn with rose-leaves, and the windows open upon flowering orange trees.

When he wrote home he wrote eloquent, witty, clever letters; but he did not speak in them of the woman with whom he spent so much of his time, and his wife as she read them wished that they had been less clever, and had said more. She began to fear lest she had done

unwisely. She did not repent, for it seemed to her that she could have done nothing else with any self-esteem ; but she dreaded lest she had over-estimated the power of her own memory upon him. Yet even so, she thought, it was better that he should degrade himself and her in her absence than her presence ; and she still felt a certainty — baseless, perhaps—that he would yet pause in time before he actually gave her a rival in her cousin's wife.

'If it were any other,' she thought, 'he might fall ; but with Olga, never ! never ! '

And she prayed for him half the night, till her prayer seemed to beat against the very gates of heaven. But in the day, to her children, to the Princess, to the household, she seemed always tranquil, cheerful, and at ease. She applied herself arduously to all those duties which her great estates had always brought with them, and in occupation and exertion strove to keep her anxiety at bay, and attain that self-control which enabled her to write in return to him letters which had no shade of reproach in them, no hint of distrust.

It was now June.

The Paris of the world of fashion was soon about to take wing, to disperse itself to country-houses, sea-shores, and foreign baths ; to change its place, but to take with it wheresoever it

should go all its agitation, its weariness, its fever, its delirium, and its intrigues. Olga Brancka saw the close of the season approach with regret yet expectation. She knew that Sabran must escape her or succumb to her; and she had a bitter, enraged sense that the power of his wife was stronger over him than her own. '*Il faut brusquer la chose,*' she said again and again to herself. She grew reckless, imprudent, and was tempted to discard even that external decency which her station in the world had made her assume. She would have compromised herself for him with any publicity he might have chosen to exact. But she had never been able to beguile him into any sort of declaration. When he most felt the danger of her attraction, when he was nearest forgetting honour and decency, nearest submitting, the memory of his wife saved him. He recovered his coolness; he drew back from the abyss. Once or twice she was tempted to throw the name of Vassia Kazán between them and watch its effect; but she refrained—she knew so little!

'You will not take me to Romaris?' she said, for the hundredth time, one evening, as they rode towards St. Germain's.

He laughed.

'*Cousinette*! if you and I went off to Finisterre you will confess that we should make a

pretty paragraph for the papers, and Count Stefan would have a very good right to run me through the lungs.'

'Stefan!' she echoed, with contempt. 'It would be the first time he ever—— Besides, you have had duels; you are not afraid of them; and, yet again, besides I do not see what harm we should do if we looked at your *chouans* and *chasse-marées* for a few days. No one need even know it.'

She spoke quite innocently, but her black eyes watched him with the 'Teufelinne' cunning and passion. He caught the look. He put his hand in the breast-pocket of his coat, where a letter of his wife's was lying.

'It is out of the question,' he said, almost rudely. 'I have no wish to furnish *Figaro* with so good a jest. Romaris,' he added, with a smile, 'is of course at your service, like all I possess, if you are so bent upon seeing its desolation. But you must pardon my receiving you by deputy, in the person of the curé, who is seventy years old and is the son of a fisherman.'

She cut her mare across the ears with a fierce gesture and galloped away from him. Sabran as he galloped after her thought with a vague apprehension, 'Why does she dwell on Romaris? Does she suspect that I abhor the place? Can she have seen anything in my looks

or in my words that has raised any doubts in her?' But he told himself that this was impossible. As she rode her heart swelled with rage and mortification. There were many men in the world who would have been happy to go at her call to Breton wilds, or any other solitude; and he refused her, bluntly, coldly, because away there in the heart of Austria a woman, who was the mother of his children, span, and read, and said her prayers, and led her stupid, blameless, stately life! He escaped her just because that woman lived! All that hot, cruel caprice which she called love fastened upon him, and swore that it would not be denied. She had a sense of a grand white figure which stood for ever betwixt him and her. She brought herself almost to believe that it was Wanda von Szalras who wronged her.

Two nights later she was present at the last night of a gay comic opera which had made all Paris laugh ever since the first fogs of winter; a dazzling little opera, with a stage crowded by Louis Treize costumes, and music that went as trippingly as a shepherdess's feet in a pastoral. Sabran went to her box after a dinner-party which he had given to a score of men. She looked well, in a gown of many shades of yellow, which few women could have braved, but which suited her night-like eyes and her

pearly skin ; she had deep yellow roses, natural ones, in her bosom and hair.

'I am flattered that you wear my yellow roses,' he murmured.

'If you had sent me white ones you would have outraged the spirit of Wanda.'

He made an impatient movement.

'When are you going home?' she said, suddenly.

'Soon!' he answered, with the same impatience.

'Soon means anything, from an hour to a year. Besides, you have said it for the last six weeks.'

'Do you go to Noisettiers?'

'Of course I go to Noisettiers ; you can come there if you please. I am more hospitable than you.'

He was silent. Noisettiers was a little place on the Norman coast, which Stefan Brancka had given to her on his marriage ; a pleasure-house, with Swiss roofs, Cairene windows, Italian balconies and a Persian court, which was bowered amongst lime-trees and filbert trees, near Villeville, and had been the scene of much riotous midsummer gaiety when she had filled it with Parisians and Russians.

'You are always too good to me,' murmured

Sabran, in the meaningless compliment of usage, as other men entered her box. But she knew by the coldness of his eyes, by the slightness of his smile, that he would no more go to Noisettiers than to Romaris.

'If Wanda had only remained here,' she thought angrily, opening and shutting her tortoiseshell fan, 'he would have done whatever I had chosen. Men are mere children; thwart them and they pine.

'I suppose,' she said aloud to him, 'you will have your own house-parties at Hohenszalras, as stiff as a minuet, crammed with grand dukes and grand duchesses, all decorum and dignity, all ennui and etiquette? By-the-by, are you restored again to the Emperor's good graces?'

'It is not likely that I shall be so,' replied Sabran, who always dreaded the subject. 'If ever I be so fortunate I shall owe it to the influence Wanda possesses.'

'Why did you offend him?' she said, bending her inquisitive glance upon him.

'All sovereigns are offended when not obeyed. We have discussed this so often. Need we discuss it again in a theatre?'

'You are very impenetrable,' she said. 'Your rule of conduct must follow the lines of M. de. Nothomb's "*il ne faut jamais se brouil-*

ler, ni se familiariser, avec qui que ce soit: c'est le secret de durer.'

'M. de Nothomb only meant his rule to apply to his own sex,' replied Sabran. 'With yours, unless a man be either *familiarisé* or *brouillé*, his life must be dull and his experience small.'

'Which will you be with me?' she said, with significance. 'The choice is open.'

He understood that the words contained a menace.

'I am your cousin and your humble servitor,' he said with gallantry, giving his place up to a young Spanish noble.

'Take me home,' she said to him an hour later, before the last scene of the opera. 'Come to supper. I told them to have ortolans and bisque. One is always hungry after a theatre, and we must have a last long talk, since you go to your duties and I to my sea-bathing.'

He desired to refuse; he dreaded her inquisitiveness and her solicitation; but she had a magic about her, she subdued him to her side even while he mentally resisted it. The fleshly charm of the 'Teufelinne' was potent as he wrapped her cloak about her and touched the yellow roses as he fastened it. Almost in silence he entered her carriage, and drove beside her to her house. She was silent also,

affecting to yawn and be tired, but by the gleam of the lamp he saw her great black eyes glowing in the darkness, as he had seen those of a jaguar in the forests of America glow, as it watched to seize a sleeping lizard or unweary capybara.

The few streets were soon traversed by her rapid Russian horses, and together they entered the little hotel, with its strong perfume of orange flowers and jessamine from the garden about it. The midsummer stars were brilliant overhead; he looked up at them, pausing on the threshold.

'You are thinking how they shine on Wanda?' she said, with the laugh he hated. 'Probably they do nothing of the kind. I dare say she is wrapped in fog and cloud: those are the joys of the heights.'

The little supper was perfectly prepared, and served with a fine claret and some tokayer; the lights burned mellowly in the transparent gourds; the windows were open, the moonlight touched the great gold birds, the silver lilies on the walls. She had studied how to live and how to please. She held that love was born as much out of scenic effects as of the senses. In her own way she was a true artist. She had left him a few moments to change her attire to a tea-gown, which was one cloud and cascade of

lace from head to foot; the yellow roses still nestled at her breast.

Stretched on a divan of oriental stuff, she put out her hand for a cigar he lighted for her, and said with a little smile:

'You cannot say I do not know how to live.'

A brutal response rose to his lips; she did not know how to bridle her life: but he could not say it. He murmured a compliment, and added: 'What a supreme artist the theatre has lost by your being born with a Countess's *couronne*!'

'Yes,' she said, with her eyes on the rings of smoke that her crimson lips parted to send upward. 'Sometimes when Stefan does not give me liberty, or Egon does not pay my accounts, I make them both tremble by a threat that I will go on the stage. I should certainly draw all Paris and all Vienna too. But perhaps it is too late; in a few more years I shall have to marry my daughters. Can you realise that? I am sure I cannot. Now it will suit Wanda perfectly to do that, and *her* daughter is not three years old; she is always so fortunate.'

He listened impatiently.

'If we left Wanda's name alone it might be better. Did you bring me to supper to talk of her?'

'No; she is your Madonna, I know. One must not be sacrilegious, but one cannot always worship. You do not touch the tokayer; it came from the Kaiser; you are always so abstemious—you irritate me.'

She poured out some of the wine into a jewel-like goblet of Venice, and gave it him and made him drink it. She sat up on her divan and leaned towards him; the breeze from the garden stirred the laces of her gown and made the golden roses nod.

'Wine openeth the heart of man,' she cried gaily. 'Open yours and tell me frankly why you refused to go to Russia? We are not in a theatre now.'

'Are we not?' he said, with the smile which she feared as her greatest foe. 'Whether or not, I fear I must refuse to please you; the matter lies between me and—the Emperor.'

She remarked the hesitation which made him pause before the last word.

'Between him and Egon,' she thought; but after all, what was the secret to her except as a means of influence over him. She believed that she had here present subtler and surer methods of influence which could attain their end without coercion.

She ceased to pursue the theme, and grew gentle and winning; she felt that he was

on the defensive. He had come weakly enough into the very heart of temptation, but he was on his guard against her sorceries. Lying back amongst her cushions she amused him with that gay and discursive chatter of which she had the secret, and which imperceptibly induced him to relax his vigilance and to feel her charm. There was that about her which made all scruples seem ridiculous ; there was a contagion of levity and mockery in her which awakened in him the cynicism of earlier years, and made him only heed the marvellous force of seduction of which she was mistress.

'You ought to be ambitious,' she continued softly. 'I think you might achieve any eminence if you chose to seek it.'

'Surely I have enough blessings from fortune not to tempt it by that last infirmity?'

'You mean you have married a very rich aristocrat,' she said drily. 'Oh, yes ; you have made one of the finest marriages in Europe; but that is not quite the same thing as "winning off your own hand." It is a lucky *coup*, like breaking the bank at *roulette*, but it cannot give you the same feeling that a successful soldier or a successful politician has, nor the same eminence. Indeed, I am not sure that your wife's possession of every possible good and

great thing has not prevented you gathering laurels for yourself. You have dropped into a nest lined with rose-leaves; to have fallen on the rocks might have been better. Do you know,' she added, with a little smile, 'if I had been your wife I should have given you no rest until you had become the foremost man of the empire. I should not have cared about horses and peasants and children; but I should have loved *you*.'

He moved uneasily, conscious of the implied satire upon his wife, conscious also of a vibration of intense passion in the last words. He remained silent.

He knew well that had she been his wife, she would have been as false to him as she was false to Stefan Brancka. But the words sent a thrill through him half of emotion, half of repugnance. There was little light on the divan where she reclined, the dewy darkness of the garden was behind her; he could see the outlines of her form, the glister of rings on her hands, and jewels at her throat, the shine of her eyes watching him ardently.

His heart beat with a certain excitation; he vaguely felt that some hour of fate had come.

They were as utterly alone as though they had been in a desert; no one of her household would have ventured to approach that room

without a summons from her. A little drummer in silver beat twelve strokes upon his drum, which was a clock. A nightingale was singing in the Cape jessamine beneath one of the casements. The light was low and soft, so faint that the moonbeams could be seen where they strayed over the cranes and lilies on the wall. She said to herself once more: '*Il faut brusquer la chose.*' If she let him go now he would escape her for ever.

Ever and again there came to him the memory of his wife, but he shrank from it as he would have shrunk from seeing her in a gambling den. It seemed almost a profanity to remember her here. He longed to rise and get away, yet he desired to remain. He knew that every moment increased his danger, and yet he prolonged those moments with irresistible pleasure. Every gesture, glance, and breath of this woman was provocative and alluring, yet he thought as he felt her power always the same thing—'*ihr seyd eine Teufelinne.*' Willingly he would have embraced her and then killed her, that she might no more haunt him and do no more harm on earth.

As he sat with his face half averted from her she gazed at him with her burning, covetous eyes; the droop of his eyelids, the curves of his lips, the fairness of his features all seemed

to her more beautiful than they had ever done; the very disquiet and coldness that were in them only allured her the more. She leaned nearer still and took his wrist in her fingers.

'Come to Noisettiers,' she murmured.

'No,' he said, sharply and sternly, but he did not withdraw his hand.

'Why not?' she said, with her whole person swayed towards him as by an irresistible impulse. 'Why do you affect to be of ice? You are not indifferent to me. You only obey what you think a law of honour. Why do you try to do that? There is only one law—love.'

He strove to draw away from him, but feebly, the clinging of her warm fingers. The caress of her breath on his cheek, the scent of the roses in her breast intoxicated him for the instant. She bent nearer and nearer, and still held him closely in her slender hands, which were as strong as steel.

'You love me?' she murmured, so low that it scarce stirred the air, and yet had all the potency of hell in it. A shudder went over him; the baseness of voluptuous impulse and the revulsion of conscious shamefulness shook his strength as though it were a reed in the wind. For a moment his arms enclosed her,

his heart beat against hers; then he thrust her away from him and rose to his feet.

'Love you? No, a thousand times no!' he said with unutterable scorn. 'You are a shameless temptress; you can rouse the beast that lies hid in all men. I despise you, I detest you—I could kiss you and kill you in a breath; but love!—how dare you speak the word? Mine is hers; I am hers: if I sinned to her with you I would strangle you when I awoke!'

All the fierceness and the barbaric strength of the blood of desert and of steppe broke up in him from underneath the courtesy and calm of many long years of culture. He was born of men who had slain their mistresses for a glance, and ravished their captives in war, and yielded them to no release but death, and his hereditary instincts broke the bonds of custom and of habit, and spoke in him now as a wild animal breaks its bars and leaps up in frank brutality of wrath. He thrust her backward and backward from him, rose to his feet, wrenched aside with rude hand the eastern stuffs that hung before the door, and left her presence and her house before any power of voice or movement had come back to her.

As he pushed past the waiting servants in the vestibule, and went through the courtyard

and the gateway, he looked up once again at the stars shining overhead.

'Wanda! Wanda!' he said with a deep breath, as men may call in their extremity on God.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WITHIN half an hour he had given a few orders to his major-domo, and had taken a special train to overtake the express, already far on its way that night towards Strasburg. No steam could fly as fast as his own wishes flew. Never had he felt happier than as the train rushed across the windy level country of the north-east, bearing him back to the peace and tenderness and honour which waited for him at Hohenszalrasburg. He was content with himself, and the future smiled on him. He slept soundly all that night, undisturbed by the panting and oscillating of the carriage, and visited by tranquil dreams. He did not break the journey till he reached S. Johann. The weather in the German lands was wild and rough. The sound

of the winds and rushing rains brought the remembrance of that year of the floods which had been the sweetest of his life. Amidst the Austrian Alps the cold was still keen, and the brisk buoyant air and the strength that seems always to come on winds that blow over glaciers and snow-fields were welcome to him, like a familiar and trusty friend. The servants who met him in answer to his message, the horses who knew him and whinnied with pleasure, the summits of the Glöckner, on which a noonday sun was shining, all were delightful to him: he thought of the Catullian 'laugh in the dimples of home.'

Their ways of life renewed themselves as if they had never been broken. She divined what had passed, but she never spoke of it. She was happy in his return, and never disturbed its happiness by inquiry or allusion. He entered with eagerness into plans and projects which had of recent years ceased to interest him, and he resumed his old occupations and pursuits with almost boyish ardour. His restlessness was appeased, and if a dull apprehension beat at his heart with warning now and then, it was scarcely heeded in his deep sense of the intense and forbearing love his wife bore to him. She never asked him how he had escaped from Olga Brancka. She

was satisfied that if he had been faithless to herself, he would not have returned with such single-hearted contentment and such lover-like fervour.

'You are the only woman in the world who can forbear from putting questions,' said Mdme. Ottilie to her.

She answered smiling:

'I remember Psyche's lamp.'

'That is very pretty,' said the Princess, 'and I do believe you would never have cared for the lamp. But, all the same, if the god had been as honest as he ought to have been, would he have minded the light?'

'I do not think that enters into the story,' said Wanda. 'He did not resent the light either; he resented the inquisitiveness.'

'You are the only woman who has none,' said the Princess, taking up her netting, and at times she called her niece Pschye, little imagining the terrible suitability of the name, and the secret that was hidden in darkness from that noble confidence of the last of the Szalras.

The remembrance of that night of base temptation left a sense of uneasiness and of insecurity upon Sabran, but the influence his temptress had possessed with him was of that kind which fades instantly in absence. He

honestly abhorred the memory of her, and never spoke her name.

His wife, to whom the utter degradation of her cousin's wife would never have seemed possible in a woman nobly born and nurtured, never imagined the truth or anything similar to it.

Another woman would have tormented herself and him with innuendo or direct reference to what had passed in those weeks when she had not been beside him, and on which he was absolutely silent. But she put all baseness of curiosity from her; she was content to know that her own influence in absence had been strong enough to bring him back to his allegiance. She would not have wished to hear, had he offered to reveal them, all the various conflicts of good and evil which had gone on in his mind, all the subtle changes by which her own power had been for a moment obscured, only to regain still stronger and purer ascendency. She was indulgent because she knew human nature well, and expected no miracles. That he had returned of his own accord, and was content so to return, was all she desired to know. If to attain that equanimity had cost her many a struggle, the fact was shut in her own soul and could concern no other. She esteemed it a poor love which

could not bear to be sometimes shut out in silence.

'For a man to be manly he must be free,' she thought; 'and how can he be free if there be someone to whom he must confess every trifle? He owes allegiance to no one but his own conscience.'

If in their intercourse she had found his honour less scrupulous, his code less fine than her own; if she had been ever pained by a certain levity and looseness of principle betrayed by him at times, she always strove not to attach too much importance to these. The creeds of a man of pleasure were necessarily different, she told herself, to those of a woman reared in austere tenets, and guarded by natural pride and purity of disposition. Whenever the fear crossed her that he might not be always faithful to her she put it away from her thoughts. 'What I have to do,' she thought, 'is to be true to him, not to question or to doubt him: a man's faithfulness has always such a different reading to a woman's.'

Sabran never quite understood the perfect indulgence to him which she combined with the greatest severity to herself. He thought that the same measure as she gave she would exact. The serenity and grandeur of her character made it seem to him impossible that she would

ever have compassion for weakness or for falsehood. He fancied, wrongly, that a woman less noble herself would be more indulgent than she would be to error. He did not realise that it is only a great nature which can wholly understand the full force of the words *aimer c'est pardonner*. And then again, he said to himself, she might have pardoned a fault, a crime even, of high passion, of bold mutiny against moral law, but how could she ever pardon a meanness, a treason, a lie?

So he let the months slide away, and did not say to her whilst he still might have said it himself, 'I am not what you think me.'

But he was impressed and profoundly affected by that mute magnanimity, which never vaunted itself or claimed any praise for itself by any hint or suggestion. He felt disgust at his own folly in ever having cared to be a single instant in the presence of the woman of whose libertinage and inconstancy his yellow roses had been the fitting symbol. When he had cast her from him, rejected and despised, the glamour she had thrown over him had fallen like scales from the eyes of one blind. Her memory made the beauty of his wife's nature and thoughts seem to him more than ever things for reverence and worship. More than ever his soul shrank within him when he recollected

the treachery and the deception with which he had rewarded this noblest of friends.

Ah! why when she had stretched out her hand to him in that supreme gift of herself, in that golden sunset hour after the autumn floods of Idrac, had he not had courage to kneel at her feet and tell her all? Perchance she might have still have loved him, might have still stooped to him!

He strove his utmost to conceal these anxious self-reproaches from her, lest she should imagine that his hours of gloom were caused by any lingering shadows of the fatal folly which had been forced on him like a drug by Olga Brancka. The sorceress had failed, and he had flung down and shivered in atoms the glass out of which she had bidden him drink; she was to him as utterly forgotten as though she were in her grave; but not so easily could he banish the memory of his own treachery to his wife. The very forbearance of her made him the more conscious of guilt, when he remembered that one man lived who knew that he was unworthy even to kiss the hem of her garment. He had been faithful to her in the present, and so could greet her with clean hands and honest lips; but in the pas he had betrayed her foully; he had done her what in her sight, if ever she knew it would

be the darkest dishonour the treachery of a human life could hold.

The sense of crime, which had slept quiet and mute in his conscience so many years, was now awake and seldom to be stilled.

The time passed serenely; the autumn brought its hardy sports, the winter its vigorous pastimes. With the new year she gave him another son; she named him after Egon Vàsàrhely, without opposition from Sabran.

'He is worthier to give them a name than I,' he thought bitterly.

They did not care to move from the green Iselthal. Of Olga Brancka they heard but rarely. Now and then she sent a little witty flippant note to Hohenszalras, dated from Paris or Trouville, or Biarritz, or Vienna, or Monaco, or St. Petersburg, according to the season and her caprices. Of these little meaningless notes Wanda did not speak to her husband. She could not bring herself to talk to him of the woman who had so nearly wrecked their peace, and it seemed to her that the old saw was wise: 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' It appeared to her, too, that theirs and Mdme. Brancka's paths in life would henceforth very seldom, if ever, meet.

Sabran believed that her overtures towards him had sprung from one of those insane unhealthy passions which sometimes are created by

their very sense of their own immorality; he fancied it had died of its own fire. He did not credit her with the tenacity and endurance she really possessed. He had little doubt that long ere now some dandy of the boulevards, some soldier of the palace, had supplanted him in that brazier of heated senses which she called by courtesy her heart. He mistook, as the cleverest men often do mistake, in underrating the cruelty of women.

The summer was a soft and sunny one, and they enjoyed it in simple and healthful pleasures of the open air and of the affections. The children throve and never ailed a day. Sabran had lost all desire to return to the excitations and passions of the world; his wife was more than content in the joys of her home; and if above her a storm brooded, if in his heart there fretted ceaselessly the chafing sense of a gross treachery, of an incessant peril, she was as ignorant of what menaced her as the child to whom she had given birth. With present security also, the sense of dread often wore away from him.

The months sped on swiftly and serenely for the mistress of Hohenszalras, the only shadows cast on them coming from accidents to her poor people through flood or avalanche, and the occasional waywardness and turbulence of her eldest born. Bela had not been the better

for his sojourn in a great city, where parasites are never lacking to the heir of wealth, and where his companions had been small coquettes and dandies *pétris du monde* at six years old. The bright vigorous hardihood of the child had escaped the contagion of affectation, but he had arrived at an inordinate sense of his own importance and dignity, despite the memory of the Dauphin which often came to him. He grew quite beyond the management of his governantes, and though he never disobeyed his mother, gave little heed to anyone else's authority. Of Sabran he was alone afraid ; but at the same time he preserved for him that silent intense admiration which a young child sometimes nourishes for a man by whom he is little noticed, but who is his ideal of all power, force, and achievement, and of whom he hears heroic tales.

He was now seven years old. It was time to think of a tutor for him, since he was beyond the control of the women entrusted with his education. When she spoke of it to his father, he answered at once :

'Take Greswold. He has the best temper in the world to govern a child, and he is a great scholar.'

'But he is a physician,' she objected.

'He has studied the mind no less than the

body. He adores the boy, and will influence him as a stranger could not. Speak to him; he will be only too happy. As no one is ever ill here,' he added with a smile, 'his present position is a sinecure; he can very well combine another office with it.'

'I wanted you to take Bela in your hands,' he said later to the old doctor, 'because I say to you what I should not care to say to a stranger. The boy has all my faults in him. As he exactly resembles me physically so he does morally. There is in him, too, I am afraid, a tendency to tyranny that I have never had. I am not cruel to anything, though I am indifferent to most things; he would be cruel if he were allowed; perhaps it is mere masterfulness which may be conquered by time. I imagine he has also my fatal facility. I call it fatal because it renders acquisition and proficiency so easy that it prevents laboriousness and depth of knowledge. You are much wiser than I am, and will know how to educate the child much better than I can tell you how to do. Only remember two things: first, that he is cursed by certain hereditary passions coming to him from me which must be checked and calmed, or he will grow up with a character dangerous to himself, and odious to others in the great position he will one day occupy.

Secondly, that if any child of mine ever bring any kind of sorrow upon her, I shall be of all men the most wretched. You have always been my good friend. Be yet more so in preventing my suffering from the pain of seeing my own moral deformities face me and accuse me in the life of her eldest son.'

The old physician listened with emotion and with surprise. Of the moral defects Sabran spoke of, he had seen none. Since his marriage his tenderness to his wife, his kindliness to his dependants, his courage in field sports, and his courtesy as a host had been all that anyone had seen in him; whilst his abstinence from all interference with and all appropriation of his wife's vast possessions had aroused a yet deeper esteem in all who surrounded him. As he heard, over the old man's mind drifted the memories of all he had observed at the time of Sabran's accident in the forest and subsequent prostration of nerve and will. But he thrust these vague suspicions away, for he was blameless in his loyalty to the house he served, and honoured as his master the husband of the Countess von Szalras.

'I will do my uttermost to deserve so precious a trust,' he said, with deep feeling. 'I think that you exaggerate childish foibles, and attach too much importance to them. The

little Count Bela is imperious and high-spirited, nothing more; and in this great household, where everyone salutes him as the heir, it is difficult to keep him wholly unspoiled by adulation and consciousness of his own future power. But a great pride has been always the mark of the race of Szalras, although my lady has so chastened hers that you may well believe the line she springs from has been always faultless as—if one may say so of any mortal—one may say she herself is. It is not from you alone that the child inherits his arrogance, if arrogant he be. As for his facility, it is like a fairy's wand, a caduceus of the gods; it may be used for good unspeakable. At least believe this, my dear lord, what any human teacher can do I will do, thankful to pay my debt so easily. I have always,' he added less gravely, 'had my own theories as to the education of young princes, and like all theorists believe everyone else who has had any doctrine on that subject to be wrong. I shall be charmed to have so happy an occasion in which to put my theories to the test. I think nature and learning together, the woods and the study, should be the preparation for the world.'

'I have entire confidence in your judgment,' said Sabran. 'Above all, try and keep the boy from pride. Train him, as Madame

de Genlis trained the d'Orleans boys, for any reverse of fortune. He is born with that temper which would make any humiliation, any loss of position, unbearable to him; and who can say——'

He paused abruptly: what he thought was, who could say that in future years Egon Vàsàrhely might not tell his son of that secret shame which hung over Hohenszalras, a cloud unseen, but big with tempest? Greswold looked at him in a surprise which he could not conceal, and Sabran left his presence hastily, under excuse of visiting some stallions arrived that morning from Tunis; he was afraid of the interrogations which the old man might be led in all innocence to make. Greswold looked after him with some anxiety; he had become sincerely attached to his lord, whose life he had saved in Pregratten; but the unevenness of his spirits, the unhappiness which evidently came over him at times in the midst of his serene and fortunate life, the strangeness of a few words which from time to time he let fall, had not escaped the quick perception of the wise physician, and gave him at intervals a vague, uncertain feeling of apprehension.

'Pride!' he thought now. 'If the little Count were not proud he would be no Szalras; and if his father have not also that superb sin

he must be a greater philosopher than I have ever thought him, and no fit mate for our lady. What should overtake the child? If war or revolution ruin him when he grows up that will be no humiliation; he will be none the less Bela von Szalras, and if he be like my lady he will be quite content with being that. Nevertheless, one must try and teach him humility—that is, one must try and make the stork creep and the oak bend!'

Sabran, as he examined his Eastern horses and conversed about them with Ulrich, was haunted by the thoughts which his own words had called up in him. It was possible, it was always possible, that if she ever knew, she might divorce him, and the children would become bastards. The Law would certainly give her her divorce, and the Church also. The most severe of judges, the most austere of pontiffs, would not hold her bound to a man who had so grossly deceived her.

By his own act he had rendered it possible for her, if she knew, to sever herself entirely from him, and make his sons nameless. Of course he had always known this. But in the first ardours of his passion, the first ecstasies of his triumph, he had scarcely thought of it. He had been certain that Vassia Kazán was dead to the whole world. Then, as the years had

rolled on, the security of his position, the calmness of his happiness, had lulled all this remembrance in him. But now tranquillity had departed from him, and there were hours when an intense dread possessed him.

True, he did justice to the veracity and honour of his foe. He believed that Vàsàrhely would never speak whilst he himself was living; but then again he himself might die at any moment, a gun accident, a false step on a glacier, a thrust from a boar or a bear, ten thousand hazards might kill him in full health, and were he dead his antagonist might be tempted to break his word. Vàsàrhely had always loved her; would it not be a temptation beyond the power of humanity to resist, when by a word he could show to her that she had been betrayed and outraged by a traitor?

And then the children?

Though were he himself dead, she would in all likelihood never do aught that would let the world know his sin, yet she would surely change to his offspring, most probably would hate them when she saw in their lives only the evidence of her own dishonour, and knew that in their veins was the blood of a man born a serf.

'Born a serf! I!' he thought, incredulous of his own memories, of his own knowledge, as

he left the haras and mounted a young half-broken English horse, and rode out into the silent, fragrant forest ways. Almost to himself it seemed a dream that he had ever been a little peasant on the Volga plains. Almost to himself it seemed an impossible fable that he had been the natural son of Paul Zabaroff and a poor maiden who had deemed herself honoured when she had been bidden to bear drink to the *barine* in his bedchamber. He had once said that he was that best of all actors, one who believes in the part he plays; and at all times, and above all since his marriage, he had been identified in his own persuasions, and his own instincts and habits, with that character of a great noble, which, when he paused to remember, he knew was but assumed. Patrician in all his temper and tone, it seemed to him, when he did so remember, incredible that he could be actually only a son of hazard, without name, right, or station in the world. Was he even the husband of Wanda von Szalras? Law and Church would both deny it were his fraud once known.

It was not very often that these gloomy terrors seized him—his temper was elastic and his mind sanguine; but when they did so they overcame him utterly; he felt like Orestes pursued by the Furies. What smote him most

deeply and hardly of all was his consciousness of the wrong done to his wife.

He rode fast and recklessly in the soft, grey atmosphere of the still day, making his young horse leap brawling stream and fallen tree-trunk, and dash headlong through the dusky greenery of the forests.

When he returned Wanda was seated on the lawn under the great yews and cedars by the keep. She kissed her hand to him as he rode in the distance up the avenue.

A little while later he joined her in her garden retreat, calm and even gay. With her greeting his terror seemed to have faded away; his home was here, he possessed her entire devotion—what was there to fear? Never had the serenity of his life here appeared more precise to him; never had the respect and honour which surrounded him seemed more needful as the bulwarks of a contented career. What could the furnace of ambition, the fatigue of exhausted pleasure give, that could equal this profound sense of peace, this cultured leisure, and this untainted atmosphere. The moral loveliness of his wife seemed to him almost more than mortal in its absolute and unconscious rejection of all things mean or base. 'The world would find the spring by following her,' seemed to

him to have been written for her—the spring of hope, of faith, of strength, of purity. Perhaps a better man might have less intensely perceived and worshipped that spiritual beauty.

'Shall we have any house-parties this year or not?' she asked him, as he joined her. 'I fear you must feel lonely here after your crowded days in Paris last year?'

'No,' he said quickly. 'Let us be without people. We had enough of the world in Paris, too much of it. How can I be lonely whilst I have you? And the weather for once is superb, and promises to remain so.'

'I do not know how it seems to you,' she replied, 'but when I came from the glare and the asphalte of Paris, these deep shadows, these cool fresh greens, these cloud-bathed mountains seemed to me to have the very calm of eternity in them. They seemed to say to me in such reproach, "Why will you wander? What can you find nobler and gladder than we are?" I want the children to grow up with that love of country in them; it is such a refuge, such an abiding, innocent joy. What does the old English poet say: 'It is to go from the world as it is man's to the world as it is God's.'

'Well, then, I now do plainly see
This busy world and I shall ne'er agree,'

he said, with a smile. 'Cowley was a very wise man; wiser than Socrates, when all is counted. But, then, Cowley forgot, and you, perhaps, forget that one must be born with that wiser, holier love in one; like any other poetic faculty or insight, it is scarcely to be taught, certainly not to be acquired. I hope your children may inherit it from you. There is no surer safeguard, no simpler happiness.'

'But since you are content, may it not be acquired?'

'Ah, my beloved!' he said with a sigh. 'Do not compare the retreat of the soldier tired of his wounds, of the gambler wearied by his losses, with the poet or the saint who is at peace with himself and sees all his life long what he at least believes to be the smile of God. Loyola and Francis d'Assissi are not the same thing, are not on the same plane.'

'What matter what brought them,' she said softly, 'if they reach the same goal?'

'You think any sin may be forgiven?' he said irrelevantly, with his face averted.

'That is a very wide question. I do not think S. Augustine himself could answer it in a word or in a moment. Forgiveness, I think, would surely depend on repentance.'

'Repentance in secret—would that avail?'

'Scarcely—would it?—if it did not attain

some sacrifice. It would have to prove its sincerity to be accepted.'

'You believe in public penance?' said Sabran, with some impatience and contempt.

'Not necessarily public,' she said, with a sense of perplexity at the turn his words had taken. 'But of what use is it for one to say he repents unless in some measure he makes atonement?'

'But where atonement is impossible?'

'That could never be.'

'Yes. There are crimes whose consequences can never be undone. What then? Is he who did them shut out from all hope?'

'I am no casuist,' she said, vaguely troubled. 'But if no atonement were possible I still think —nay, I am sure—a sincere and intense regret which is, after all, what we mean by repentance, must be accepted, must be enough.'

'Enough to efface it in the eyes of one who had never sinned?'

'Where is there such an one? I thought you spoke of heaven.'

'I spoke of earth. It is all we can be sure to have to do with; it is our one poor heritage.'

'I hope it is but an antechamber which we pass through, and fill with beautiful things, or befoul with dust and blood, at our own will.'

'Hardly at our own will. In your ante-

chamber a capricious tyrant waits us all at birth. Some come in chained ; some free.'

They were seated at her favourite garden-seat, where the great yews spread before the keep, and far down below the Szalrassee rippled away in shining silver and emerald hues, bearing the Holy Isle upon its waters, and parting the mountains as with a field of light. The impression which had pursued her once or twice before came to her now. Was there any error in his own life, any cruel, crooked twist of circumstance concealed from her ? An exceeding tenderness and pity yearned in her towards him as the thought arose. Was he, with all his talent, power, pride, grace, and strength, conscious of fault or failure, weighted with any burden ? It seemed impossible. Yet to her fine instinct, her accurate ear, there was in these generalities the more painful, the more passionate, tone of personal remorse. She might have spoken, might once more have said to him what she had once said, and invited him to place a fearless confidence in her affection ; but she remembered Olga Brancka ; she shrank from seeking an avowal which might be so painful to him and her alike.

At that moment the pretty figure of the Princess Ottilie appeared in the distance, a lace hood over her head, a broad red sunshade held

above that, and Sabran rose to go forward and offer her his arm.

'You are always lovers still, and one is afraid of interrupting you,' she said, as she took one of the gilded wicker chairs. 'I have had a letter from Olga Brancka; the post is come in. She says she will honour you in the autumn on her way to waiting at Gödöllö.'

'It is impossible!' cried Sabran, who grew first red, then pale.

'Nothing is impossible with Olga,' said the Princess, drily. 'I see even yet you are not acquainted with her many qualities, which include among them a will of steel.'

'She cannot come here,' he said in haste under his breath.

Wanda looked at him a moment.

'My aunt shall tell her that it will not suit us. She can go to Gödöllö by way of Gratz,' she said quietly.

The Princess shifted her sunshade.

'What effect do you think that will have? She will cross your mountains, and she will call up a snowstorm by incantation, so that you will be compelled to take her in. You who know so much of the world, René, can you inform me how it is that women possess tenacity of will in precise proportion to the frivolity of their

lives? All these butterflies have a volition of iron.'

'It is egotism,' he replied with effort, unable to recover his astonishment and disgust. 'Intensely selfish people are always very decided as to what they wish. That is in itself a great force; they do not waste their energies in considering the good of others.'

'Olga's energies are certainly not wasted in that direction,' said Mdme. Ottilie.

Sabran rose and went in for his letters. It was intolerable to him to hear the name of this woman, whom he had only escaped by brutal violence, spoken in the presence of his wife; and even to him, hardened to the vices of the world though experience had made him, it had never occurred as possible that she would have the audacity to come thither; he had too hastily taken it for granted that conscience would have kept her clear of their path for ever, unless the hazards of society should have brought them perforce together. The most secretive of men is always more sincere than an insincere and crafty woman, and he was overwhelmed for the moment at the infamy and the hardihood of a character which he had flattered himself he had understood at a glance. He forgot the truth that 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.'

'There is not a *déclassée* in Paris who would

not have more decency!' he thought bitterly. He stood in the Rittersaal and affected to be occupied with his letters; but his eyes only followed their lines, his mind was absent. He saw no way to prevent her continued intimacy with them, if she were vile enough to persist in enforcing it. He could not tell Egon Vàsàrhely or Stefan Brancka; a man cannot betray a woman, however base she may be. He could not tell his wife of that hateful hour, which seemed burnt into his brain as aquafortis bites into metal. He shuddered as he thought of her here, in this house which had known so many centuries of honour. He cursed the weak and culpable folly which had first led him into her snares. If he had not dallied with this Delilah, she would have been vile of purpose and of nature in vain. He had escaped her indeed at the last; he had indeed remained faithful in act to his wife; but had it been such fidelity of the soul and the mind as she deserved? Would not even the semi-betrayal bring its punishment soon or late? Could he ever endure to see her beside the woman who so nearly had tempted him? He felt that he would sooner kill the other, as he had threatened, rather than let her set foot across the sacred threshold of Hohenszalras.

'I knew what she was,' he thought with

endless self-accusation. 'Why did I ever loiter an hour by her side, why did I ever look once at her hateful eyes?'

If she had been a stranger he would have braved his wife's scorn of himself and told her all, but when it was her cousin's wife—one who even had once been in a still nearer relationship to her—he could not do it. It seemed to him as if such nearness of shame would be so horrible to her that he would be included in her righteous hatred of it.

Moreover, long habit had made him reticent, and silence always seemed to him safety.

After some meditation he took his way to the library and there wrote a brief letter. He said in it, with no preamble, ceremony, or courtesy, that he begged to decline for himself and his wife the honour of the Countess Brancka's presence at Hohenszalras. He sealed it with his arms, and sent a special messenger with it to Matrey. He said nothing of what he had done to his wife or her aunt.

He knew that if his antagonist were so disposed she could make feud between him and her husband for the insult which that curt rejection of her offered visit bore with it. But that did not weigh on him; he would have been glad to have a man to deal with in the

matter. All he cared to do was to preserve his home from the pollution of her presence. Moreover, he knew that it would not be like the *finesse* and secrecy of Olga Brancka to do aught so simple or so frank as to seek the support of her lord.

Meantime, the Princess was saying to his wife:

'Will you receive Olga? She will not give up her wishes; she will force her way to you.'

'How can I refuse to receive Stefan's wife?'

'It would be difficult, but you would be justified. She endeavoured to draw your husband into an intrigue.'

'Are we sure? Let us be charitable.'

'My dear Wanda, you are a truer Christian than I am.'

'Justice existed before Christianity, if you do not think me profane to say so. I try to be just.'

'Justice is blind,' said the Princess, drily. 'I never understood very well how, being so, she can see her own scales.'

Wanda made no reply. She had not been blind, but she would have never said to any living being all that she had suffered in those weeks when he had stayed behind her in Paris. That he had returned to her blameless she was

certain ; she had put far behind her for ever the remembrance of those the only hours of anxiety and pain which he had given her since their marriage.

The Princess, communing with herself, wrote a letter to the Countess Brancka, chill and austere, in which she conveyed in delicate, but sufficiently clear, language, her sense that the same roof should not shelter her and Sabran, especially when the roof was that of Hohenszalras. She sent it because she believed it to be her duty to do so, but she had little faith in its efficacy. She would have written also to Stefan Brancka, but she knew him to be a weak, indulgent, careless man, still young, who had been lenient to his wife's follies and frailties, and who was only kept from ruin by the strong hand of his brother. If she told him what was after all mere conjecture, he might only laugh ; if he did not laugh he might kill Sabran in a duel, were his Magyar blood fired by suspicion. No one could be ever sure what Count Stefan would or would not do ; the only thing sure was that he would be never wise. To his wife herself he was absolutely indifferent, but this did not prevent him from having occasional moods of furious resentment against her. He was too unstable and too perilous a person to resort to in any difficulty.

In a few days she received her answer, though Sabran received none. It was brief and playful and pathetic.

'Beloved and reverend Mother,—You never like me, you always lecture me, but I am glad that you honour me by remembrance, even if it be to upbraid. I know not of what mysterious crime you suspect me, nor do I understand your allusions to M. de Sabran. I have always found him charming, and I think if he had not married so rich a woman he would have been eminent in some way; but content slays ambition. Salute Wanda lovingly and the pretty children. How is your little Ottilie? My Mila and Marie are grown out of knowledge. We shall soon have to be thinking of their *dots*—alas! where will these come from? Stefan and I have been the prey of unjust stewards and extortionate tradesfolk till scarce anything is left except the mine at Schermnitz. Pity me a little, and pray for me much.

'Your ever devoted

'Olga.'

Princess Ottilie was a holy woman, and knew that rage was a sin against herself and heaven, but when she had read this note she tore it in a hundred pieces, and stamped her

small foot upon it, trembling with passion the while.

Two months went on; the Countess Olga wrote no more; they deemed themselves delivered from her threatened presence. She had not replied to his refusal to permit her to come thither, and Sabran felt relieved from an intolerable position. Had she persisted, he had decided to make full confession to his wife rather than permit her to receive ignorantly the insult of such a visit.

It was now the end of September, and the weather remained fine and open. He spent a great deal of his time out of doors, and took his old interest in the forests, the stud, and the hunting. The letter of Olga Brancka had brought close to him again the peril from which he had so hardly escaped in Paris, and the peace and sweetness of his home-life seemed the more precious to him by contrast. The high intelligence, the serene temper of his wife, and her profound affection seemed to him treasures for which he could be never grateful enough to fate and fortune; their days passed in tranquil and sunny happiness; but ever and again a word, a look, the merest trifle, sufficed to awake the sleeping snake of remorse which was dormant in his breast.

One day he took Bela with him when he

rode—a rare honour for the child, who rode superbly. His pony kept fair pace with his father's English hunter, and even the leaping did not scare either it or its rider.

'Bravo, Bela!' said Sabran, when they at last drew rein; 'you ride like a centaur. Is your education advanced enough to know what centaurs were?'

'Oh! they were what I should love to be,' replied Bela rapturously. 'They were joined on to the horse!'

Sabran laughed. 'Well, a good rider is one with his horse, so you may come very near your ideal. Ulrich has taught you an admirable seat. You are worthy of your mother in the saddle.'

Bela coloured with pleasure.

'In the study you are not so, I fear?' Sabran continued. 'You do not like learning, do you?'

'I like some sorts,' said the child with a little timidity; 'I like history, knowing what the people did in the other ages. Now the Herr Professor lets us do our lessons out of doors, I do not mind them at all. As for Gela, he likes nothing but books and pictures,' he added, with a sense of his one grief against his brother.

'Happy Gela! whatever his fate in life he

will never be alone,' said his father, as he dismounted to let his hunter take breathing space. The child leapt lightly from his saddle, took his little silver folding cup out of his pocket, and drank at a spring, one of the innumerable springs rushing over the mossy stones and flower-filled grass.

'One is never alone with horses?' he said shyly, for he never lost his awe of Sabran.

'Unless one be ill; then a horse is sorry consolation, and books and art are faithful companions.'

'I have never been ill,' said Bela, with a little wonder at himself. 'I do not know what it is like.'

'It is to be dependent upon others. A hero or a king grows as helpless as a lame beggar when he is ill; you will not escape the common lot; and when you stay in your bed, and your pony in his stall, then you will be glad of Gela and his books.'

'Oh! I do love Gela always,' said the child hastily and generously; 'and the Herr Professor says he is ever—ever—so much cleverer than I am; a million times more clever!'

'You are clever enough,' said Sabran. 'If you do not let yourself be vain and over-bearing you will do well. Try and remember that if your pony made a false slip to-day and you

fell badly, all your good health would vanish at a stroke, and all your greatness would serve you nothing. You would envy any one of the boys going with whole limbs up into the hills, and, perhaps, all your mother's love and wealth could do nothing to mend your bones again.'

Bela listened with a grave face; when women, even his fearless mother, spoke to him in such a way, he was apt to think with disdain that they over-rated danger because they were women; and when his tutor so addressed him, he was also apt to think that it was because the good professor was a bookworm and cared for weeds, stones, and butterflies. But when his father said so, he was awed; he had heard Ulrich and Otto tell a hundred stories of their lord's prowess and courage and magnificent strength, for the deeds of Sabran in the floods and on the mountains had become almost legendary in their heroism to all the mountaineers of the Hohe Tauern, and all the dwellers on the Danube forest.

'But ought one not to be brave?' he said with hesitation. 'You are.'

'We ought to be brave, certainly, or we are not fit to live; but we must not be vain of being brave, nor rely upon it too much. Courage is a mere gift of'—he was about to say 'chance,' but seeing the blue eyes of the

child fastened upon him, changed the word and said 'a gift of God.'

'What a handsome boy he is,' he thought, as he looked thus at his little son. 'And how wise it is to leave children wholly to their mothers when their mothers are wise!'

'I will remember,' said Bela thoughtfully; 'when I am a man I want to be just what you are.'

Sabran turned away at the innocent words. 'Be what your mother's people were, and I shall be content,' he said gravely.

'But your people too,' said Bela; 'they were very great and very good. The Herr Professor reads us things out of that big book on Mexico, and the Marquis Xavier was a saint, he says. Gela likes the book better than I because it is all about birds, and beasts, and flowers; but the part about the Indians, and the Incas, that pleases me; and then there are the Breton stories too that are in real history, they are quite beautiful, and I would die like that.'

Bela's tongue once loosened seldom paused of its own accord; his eyes were dark and animated, his face was eager and proud.

'The Marquis Xavier was a saint, indeed,' said his father abruptly. 'Revere his name. All my children should revere his name and memory. But lean most to your mother's

people; you are Austrian born, and the chief of your duties and possessions will be in Austria. I think you would die heroically, my boy, but you will find that it is harder to live so. The horses are rested, let us ride home; it grows late for you.'

Bela, whose mind was quick in intuition, felt that his father did not care to talk about Mexico or Bretagne.

'I will ask the Herr Professor if I did wrong to speak to him of the big book,' he said to himself as he mounted his pony; he was very anxious to please his father, but he was afraid he had missed the way. 'I suppose it is because they were only saints, and the Szalras were all soldiers,' he thought on reflection, soldiers being by far the foremost in his esteem.

'He says it is harder to live well than to die well,' said Bela over his bread and milk that night to his brother.

'I suppose that is because dying is over so soon,' said the meditative Gela; 'and you know it must take an *enormous* time to live to be old—quite old—like Aunt Ottilie.'

'I should like to die very grandly,' said Bela with shining eyes, 'and have all the world remember me for ever and for ever, as they do great Rudolph.'

'I should like to die saving somebody,'

said Gela, 'just as Uncle Bela saved the pilgrims; that would please our mother best.'

'I should like to die in battle,' said the living Bela; 'and that would please our mother, because so many of us have always died so fighting the French, or the Prussians, or the Turks. When I am a man I shall die like Wallenstein.'

'But Wallenstein was killed in a room,' said Gela, who was very accurate.

'You are always so particular!' said Bela impatiently, who had himself only a vague idea of Wallenstein, as of someone who had gone on fighting without stopping for thirty years.

'The Herr Professor says it is just being particular which makes the difference between the scholar and the sciolist,' said Gela solemnly, his pretty rosy lips closing carefully over the long word *halbgelehrte*.

This night after the ride he and she dined quite alone. As he sat in the Rittersaal and looked at the long line of knights, the many blazoned shields, the weapons borne in gallant warfare, a sudden sensation came to him of the vile thing that he did in being in this place. It seemed to him that those armoured figures should grow animate and descend and drive him out. Bela, then sleeping happily, dreaming of the glories of his ride, had raised with his

innocent words a torturing spirit in his father's breast. What had he brought to this haughty and chivalrous race?—the servile Slav, the barbaric Persian, blood, and all the dishonour that their creed would hold the basest upon earth. Besides, to lie to *her* children! Even the blue eyes of the boy had made him embarrassed and humiliated, as if she were judging him through her first-born's gaze. What would it be when that child, grown to man's estate, should speak to him of his people, of his forefathers?

For the first time it occurred to him that these boys would inevitably, as they grew older, ask him many questions, wish to know many things. He could turn aside a child's inquisitive interest, but it would be more painful, less easy, to refuse to supply a grown youth's legitimate interrogations. All these children would some time or another make many inquiries of him that his wife, out of delicate sympathy, never had intruded upon him. The fallen fortunes of the Sabran race had always seemed to her one of those blameless misfortunes for which the best respect is shown by silence. But her sons would naturally, one day or another, be more interested in learning more of those from whom they were descended.

The lie in reply would be easy and secure. There were all the traditions and recollections of

the Sabrans of Romaris to be gathered from the tongues of the people in Finisterre, and the private papers of their race which he possessed. He could answer well enough, but it would be a lie, and a lie seemed to him now a disgrace? Before his marriage he had looked on falsehood as a necessary part of the world's furniture, but he had not lived all these years beside a noble nature, to which even a prevarication was impossible, without growing ashamed of his former laxities.

'There is not a dead man amongst all those knights who bore these arms that should not rise to punish and disown me!' he thought with poignant hatred of his past.

When he went to his room the impulse once more came over him to tell his wife all; to throw himself on her mercy, and let her do the worst she would; but he had a certain fear of her which acted like a spell on that moral cowardice, which his Slav temperament and his hidden secret combined to bind in a dead weight on the physical courage and natural pride of his character.

He resolved to do his uttermost as they grew older to rear his sons to worthiness of that great race whose name they bore; to uproot in them by all means in his power any falser or darker faults they might have inherited from

him. He promised himself so to watch over his own words and deeds that as they grew to manhood they should find no palliative or example of wrong-doing in his life. The closeness of his peril, the folly of his dalliance with Olga Brancka, had left him distrustful and diffident of his own powers to resist evil. He said to himself that he would seek the world no more; his wife was happiest in her own dominion, amidst her own people; he would court neither pleasure nor ambition again. Here he had peace; here he loved and was beloved; here he would abide, and let courts and cities hold those less blessed than he.

In the morning he awoke refreshed and tranquil; a beautiful sunrise was tinging with rose the snows of the opposite Venediger peaks; the flush of early autumn was upon the lower woods, but no snow had fallen even on the mountains. The lake was deeply green as a laurel leaf, and its waters rolled briskly under a strong breeze. It was a brilliant day for the hills, and the *jägermeister* and his men were in waiting, for he had arranged over night to go chamois-hunting on those steep alps and glaciers which towered above the hindmost forests of Hohenszalras. He did not very often give rein to his natural love of field sports, for he knew that his wife liked to feel that the innocent

creatures of the mountains were safe wherever she ruled. But there was real sport to be had here, with every variety of danger accompanying to excuse it, and Otto and his men were proud of their lord's prowess and perseverance on the high hills, and only sorrowed that he so often let his rifles lie unused in the gun-room. He went out whilst the day was still red and young, like a rose yet in bud, and climbed easily and willingly the steep paths and precipitous slopes which led to the glaciers.

'Count Bela wants sadly to come with us one of these days,' said Otto, with a broad smile. 'He can use his crampons right manfully; will not the Countess soon let me teach him to shoot?'

'I think not willingly, Otto,' said Sabran. 'She thinks children's hands are best free of bloodshed; and so do I. It can do a child no good to see the dying agony of an innocent creature. Teach Herr Bela to climb as much as you like, but leave powder and shot alone.'

'I am sure the Herr Marquis himself must have been a fine shot very early?'

'I was at a semi-military college,' said Sabran, thinking of those days at the Lycée Clovis when he had sought the *salle d'armes* with such eagerness, as being the scene of those

lessons which would most surely enable him to meet men as their equal or their master.

'If only Count Bela might be taught to shoot at a mark?' said the old huntsman, wistfully.

'You know very well, Otto, that your lady decides everything for her children, and that all her decisions I uphold,' said his master. 'Be sure they are wiser than either yours or mine would be. She can teach him herself, too; she can hit a running mark as well as you or I. Do you remember the day when you arrested me in these woods?'

'Ah, my lord!' said Otto, with a rolling oath; 'never can I pardon myself, though you have so mercifully pardoned me!'

'And my good rifle is still lying in the bed of the lake,' said Sabran, glancing backward at the Szalrassee, now many hundred feet below them, a mere green ribbon shining through the deeper green of fir and pine woods.

'Yes, my lord!' answered the man, cheerily. 'The good English rifle indeed was lost; but it seems to me that the Herr Marquis did not make wholly a bad exchange!'

'No, indeed,' said his master, as he paused and looked down to where the towers and spires of Hohenszalras glimmered like mere points of glittering metal in the sunshine far below.

They were now at the highest altitude at which *gemsbocks* are found, and the business of the day commenced as they sighted what looked like a mere brown speck against the greyness of the opposite glacier. Before the day was done Sabran had shot to his own gun eight chamois on the heights, and some score of ptarmigan and black-cock on the lower level. He saw more than one *kuttengeier* and *lammergeier*, but, in deference to the traditions of the Szalras, did not fire on them. The healthful fatigue, the rarefied air, the buoyant exhilaration which comes with the atmosphere of the great heights, made him feel happy, and gave him back all his confidence in the present and the future. When he rested on a ledge of rock, listening to Otto's hunter's tales, and making a frugal meal of some hard biscuit and a draught of Voslauer, he wondered at himself for having so recently been beguiled by the febrile excitations of Paris, or having desired the fret and wear of a public career. What could be better than this life was? To have sought to leave it was folly and ingratitude. The peace and the calm of the great mountains which she loved so well seemed to descend into his soul.

It was twilight when they reached the lower slopes of the hills, the jägers loaded with game, he and Otto walking in front of them. From

the still far-off islet on the lake, and from the belfry of the Schloss, the Ave Maria was chiming; the deep-toned bells of the latter ringing the Emperor's Hymn.

Talking gaily with Otto, with that frank kindliness which endeared him to all these mountaineers, he approached the house slowly, fatigued with the pleasant tire of a healthy and vigorous man after a long day's pastime on the hills, and entered by a back entrance, which led through the stables into the wing of the building where his own private rooms were situated. He took his bath and dressed himself for the evening, then went on his way across the vast house to the white salon, where his wife and her aunt were usually to be found at the time of the children's hour before dinner. With some words on his lips to claim her praise for having spared the vultures, he pushed aside the *portière* and entered, but the words died on his tongue, half spoken.

His wife was there, but before the hearth, seated with her profile turned towards him, also was Olga Brancka. His wife, who was standing, came towards him.

'My cousin Olga took us by surprise an hour ago. The telegram must have missed us which she says she sent yesterday from Salzburg.'

Her eyes had a cold gaze as she spoke; her sense of the duties of hospitality and of high breeding had alone compelled her to give any form of welcome to her guest. Mdme. Brancka, playing with a feather screen, looked up with a little quiet self-satisfied smile.

'Unexpected guests are the most welcome. When there is an old proverb, pretty if musty, all ready made for you, Réné, why do you not repeat it? I am truly sorry, though, that my telegram miscarried. I suspect it comes from Wanda's old-fashioned prejudice against having a wire of her own here from Lienz. I dare say they never send you half your messages.'

Sabran had mechanically bowed over the hand she held out to him, but he scarcely touched it with his own. He was deadly pale. The amazement that her effrontery produced on him was stupefaction. Versed in the ways of women and of the world though he was, he was speechless and helpless before this incredible audacity. She looked at him, she smiled, she spoke, like the most innocent and unconscious creature. For a moment an impulse seized him to unmask her then and there, and hound her out of his wife's presence; the next he knew that it was impossible to do so. Men cannot betray women in that way, nor was he even wholly free enough from blame himself to have

the right to do so. But an intense rage, the more intense because perforce mute, seized him against this intruder by his hearth. Only to see her beside his wife was an intolerable suffering and shame. When he recovered himself a little, feeling his wife's gaze upon him, he said with some plain incredulity in his contemptuous words:

'The failure of messages is often caused by the senders of them; the people are extremely careful at Lienz. I do not think the fault lies *there*. We can, however, only regret the want of due warning, for the reason that we can give no fit or flattering reception of an honoured guest. You come from Paris?'

For the first time a slight sudden flush rose upon Olga Brancka's cheek, callous though she was. She felt the irony and the disdain. She perceived that she had in him an inexorable foe, beyond all allurement and all entreaty.

'I passed by Paris,' she answered, easily enough. 'Of course I had to see my tailors, like everyone else in September. I have been first to Noissetiers, then to London, then to Homburg, then to Russia. I do not know where I have not been since we met. And you good people have been vegetating beneath your forests all that time? I was curious to come

and see you in your felicity. Hohenszalrasburg used to be called the vulture's nest; it appears to have become a dove's!'

'I spared a whole family of *lammergeier* to-day in deference to your forest law,' he said, turning to his wife, whilst to himself he thought what a far worse beast of prey was sitting here, smoothing her glossy feathers in the warmth of his own hearth. She noticed the extreme pallor of his face, the sound of anger and emotion forcibly restrained; she imagined something of what he felt, though she could guess neither its intensity nor its extent. She had done herself violence in meeting with courtesy and tranquillity the woman who now sat between them, but she could not measure or imagine the guilt and the audacity of her.

When, that evening, as twilight came on, she had heard the sound of wheels beneath the terraces, and in a little while had been informed by Hubert that the Countess Brancka had arrived, her first movement had been to refuse to receive her, her next to remember that to one who had been Gela's wife, and now was Stefan Brancka's, the doors of Hohenszalras could not be shut without an open quarrel and scandal, which would regale the world and make feud inevitable between her husband and the whole race of Vàsàrhely. The Vàsàrhely knew

the worthlessness of Stefan's wife, but for the honour of their name they would never admit that they did so; they would never fail to defend her. Moreover, hospitality of a high and antique type had always been the first of obligations upon all those whom she descended from and represented. They would not have refused to harbour their worst foe if he had demanded asylum. They would not have turned away sovereign or beggar from their gates. Those days were gone, indeed, but their high and generous temper lived in her. In the brief space in which Hubert, having made the announcement, waited for her commands, she had struggled with her own repugnance and conquered it. She had told herself that to turn Stefan's wife from her doors would be the mere vulgar melodrama of a common and undignified anger. After all she knew nothing; therefore she traversed the house to receive her unasked guest, and gave her welcome without any pretence of cordiality or friendship, but with a perfect and unhesitating politeness void of all offence.

She was thankful that the Princess Ottilie was again in the south of France with her sister-in-law of Lilienhöhe, so that her indignation, her interrogation, and her quick regard were spared to them. Now that her niece was

no longer alone, the Princess did not think it her bounden duty to endure these northern winds, blowing from Poland and the Baltic over the old duchy of Austria, which she had at all times so peculiarly detested, though she had been born a thousand miles nearer the Baltic herself.

Olga Brancka had been profuse in her apologies and expressions of regret, but she had at once let her carriage, hired at S. Johann, with its four post-horses changed at Matrey, be taken to the stables, and had gone herself to her old apartments, where in little time her two maids had altered her heavy furs and travelling clothes to the costume of consummate simplicity and elegance in which she now sat, putting forth her small feet in rose satin shoes to the warmth from the great Hirschvogel stove, which, with its burnished and enamelled colour, illumined one side of the white salon.

Sabran and his wife both remained standing, he leaning his arm on the scroll work of the great stove, she playing with the delicate ears of one of the hounds. Mdme. Brancka alone sat and leaned back in her low seat, quite content; she was aware that she was unwelcome, and that her presence was an embarrassment and worse. But the sense of the wrong and cruel position in which she placed them was sweet

and pungent to her; she was refreshed by the very sense of dilemma and of danger which surrounded her. She had her vengeance in her hand, and she would not exhaust it quickly, but tasted its savour with the slow care and patient appetite of the connoisseur in such things. She had a Chinese-like skill in patiently drawing out the prolonged pangs of an ingeniously invented martyrdom.

'Why do you both stand?' she said, looking up at him between her half-closed lids. 'Are you standing to imply to me as we do with monarchs, "This house is yours whilst you are in it?" I am much obliged, but I should sell it at once if it were really mine. It is a splendid, barbaric solitude, like Taróc. We have not been to Taróc this year. Stefan says Egon lives altogether with his troopers and grows very morose. You hear from him sometimes, I suppose?'

To Sabran it seemed as if her half shut black eyes shot forth actual sparks of fire, as she spoke the name which he could never hear without an inward spasm of fear.

'Of course I hear from Egon,' said his wife. 'But he writes very briefly; he was never much of a penman. He prefers a rifle, a sword, a riding-whip.'

'I hear you have called the last child after

him? Where are the boys? They cannot be in bed. Let me see them. It is surely their hour to be here. Réné, ring, and send for them.'

His brow contracted.

'No; it is late,' he said abruptly. 'They would only weary you; they are barbaric, like the house.'

He felt an extreme reluctance to bring his children into her presence, to see her speak to them, touch them; he was longing passionately to seize her and thrust her out of the doors. As she sat there in the full light of the many wax candles burning around, sparkling, imperturbable, like a coquette of a vaudeville, with her rose satin, and her white taffetas, and her lace ruff, and her pink coral necklace and ear-rings, and a little pink coral hand upholding her curls in the most studied disorder, she seemed to him the loathliest thing that he had ever seen. He hated her more intensely than he had ever hated anyone in all his life; even more than he had hated the traitress who had sold him to the Prussians.

'Pray let me see the children; I know you never dine till eight,' she was persisting to his wife, who knew well that she was entirely indifferent to the children, but who was not unwilling for their entrance to break the constraint of what was to her an intolerable trial.

She did ring, and ordered their presence. They soon came, making their obeisances with the pretty grave courtliness which they were taught from infancy; the boys in white velvet dresses, while their sister, in a frock of old Venetian point, looked like a Stuart child painted by Vandyck.

'*Ah, quels amours!*' cried Olga Brancka, with admirable effusion, as they kissed her hand. Sabran turned away abruptly, and muttering a word as to some orders he had to give the stud-groom, left the chamber without ceremony, as she, with an ardour wholly unknown to her own daughters, lifted the little Ottilie on her knee and kissed the child's rose-leaf cheek.

'What lovely creatures they are,' she said in German; 'and how they have grown since they left Paris. They are all the image of Réné; he must be very proud. They have all his eyes—those deep dark-blue eyes, like jewels, like the depths of the sea.'

'You are very poetic,' said Wanda; 'but I should be glad if you would speak their praises in some tongue they do not understand. The boys may not be hurt; but Lili, as we call her, is a little vain already, though she is so young.'

'Would you deny her the birthright of her sex?' said Mdme. Brancka, clasping her coral

necklace round the child's throat. 'Surely she will have lectures enough from her godmother against all feminine foibles. By the way, where is the Princess?'

'My aunt is with the Lilienhöhe.'

'I am grieved not to have the pleasure,' murmured Mdme. Brancka, indifferently, letting Ottilie glide from her lap.

'Give back the necklace, *liebling*,' said Wanda, as she unclasped it.

'No, no; I entreat you—let her keep it. It is leagues too large, but she likes it, and when she grows up she will wear it and think of me.'

'Pray take it,' said Wanda, lifting it from the child's little breast. 'You are too kind; but they must not be given what they admire. It teaches them bad habits.'

'What severe rules!' cried Madame Brancka. 'Are these poor babies brought up on S. Chrysostom and S. Basil? Is Lili already doomed to the cloister? You are too austere; you should have been an abbess instead of having all these golden-curled cupidons about you. Where is the youngest one, Egon's namesake?'

'He is in his cot,' said Gela, who was always very direct in his replies, and who found himself addressed by her.

Meantime Bela took hold of his mother's hand and whispered to her, '*Mütterchen*, she is rude to you. Send her away.'

'My darling,' answered Wanda, 'when people laugh in our own house we must let them do it, even if it be at ourselves. And, Bela, to whisper is *very* rude.'

'Egon is so little,' continued Gela, plaintively. 'He cannot read; I do not think he ever will read!'

'But you could not when you were as small as he?'

'Could I not?' said Gela, doubtfully, to whom that time seemed many centuries back.

'And Lili, can she read?' said Mdme. Olga, suppressing a yawn.

'Oh yes,' said Gela; 'at least, two-letter words she can; and me, I read to her.'

'What model children!' cried Mdme. Brancka, with a little laugh. 'And the naughty boy who was in a rage because he was not permitted to go to Chantilly? That was Bela, was it not? Bela, do you remember how cruel your mother was, and how you cried?'

Bela looked at her, with his blue eyes growing as stern and cold as his father's.

'My mother is always right,' he said gallantly. 'She knows what I ought to do. I

do not think I cried, *meine gnädige Frau*; I never cry.'

'Even the naughty boy has become an angel! What a wonderful disciplinarian you are, Wanda! If your children were not so handsome they would be insufferable with their goodness. They are very handsome; they are just like Sabran, and yet they are not at all a Russian type.'

'Why should they be Russian? We have no Russian blood,' said their mother, in surprise.

Mdme. Brancka laughed a little confusedly, and fluttered her feather screen.

'I do not know what I was thinking of. Réné always reminds me of my old friend Paul Zabaroff; they are very alike.'

'I have seen the present Prince Zabaroff,' said Wanda, wondering what the purpose of her guest's words were. 'He was not, as I remember him, much like M. de Sabran.'

'Oh, of course he was not equal to your Apollo,' said Mdme. Brancka, winding Ottilie's long hair round her fingers.

'You have had enough of them; they must not worry you,' said their mother, and she dismissed the children with a word.

'In what marvellous control you keep them,' said Mdme. Olga. 'Now, my children

never obeyed me, let me scream at them as I would.'

'I do not think screaming has much effect on anyone, young or old.'

'It paralyses a man. But I suppose a child can always out-scream one?'

'Probably. A child never respects any person who loses their calmness. As for men, you are better versed in their follies than I.'

'But do you and Réné absolutely never quarrel?'

'Quarrel! My dear Olga, how very *bürgerlich* an idea.'

'Do you suppose only the bourgeois quarrel?' said Mdme. Brancka. 'Really you live in your enchanted forest until you forget what the world is like,' and she began an interminable history of the scenes between a friend of hers and her husband and her family, a quarrel which had ended in *conseils judiciaires* and separation. 'It is a cruel thing that there is not one law of divorce for all the world,' she said with a sigh, as she ended the unsavoury relation. 'If Stefan and I could only set each other free, we should have done it years and years ago.'

'I did not know your griefs against Stefan were so great?'

'Oh, I have no great griefs against him; he

is *bon enfant*: but we are both ruined, and we both detest each other; we do not know very well why.'

'Poor Mila and Marie!'

'What has it to do with them? They are happy at Sacré Cœur, and when they come out they will marry. Egon will be sure to portion them; we cannot. We are not like you, who will be able to give a couple of millions to Lili without hurting her brothers.'

'Lili's *dot* is far enough in the future,' said Lili's mother, who, very weary of the conversation, saw with relief the doors open, and heard Hubert announce that dinner could be served. By an opposite door Sabran entered also, a moment later. The dinner was tedious to both him and her; they alike found it an almost intolerable penance. Their guest alone was gay, ironical, at her ease, and never at a loss for a topic. Sabran looked at her now and then with absolute wonder coming over him as to whether he had not dreamed of that evening in Paris, alone beside her, with the smell of the jasmine and orange-buds, and the moonbeams crossing her white throat, her auburn curls. Was it possible that a woman lived with such incredible self-control, insolence, shamelessness? There was not a shadow of consciousness in her regard, not a moment

of uneasiness in her manner. Except the one passing faint flush which had come on her face at his words of greeting, there was not a single sign that she was other than the most innocent of women. The impatience, the disgust, the amazement which were in him were too strong for his worldly tact and composure altogether to conquer them ; his eyes were downcast, his words were studied or irrelevant, his discomposure was evident ; he felt as reluctant to meet the gaze of his wife as of his enemy. In vain did he endeavour to sustain equably the airy nothings of the usual dinner-table conversation. He was sensible of an effort too great for art to cover it ; he felt that there was a strange sound in his voice, he fancied the very men waiting upon him must be conscious of his embarrassment. If he could have turned her out of the house he would have been at peace, for, after all, her offences were much greater than his own ; but to be compelled to sit motionless whilst she called his wife caressing names, broke her bread, and would sleep under her roof, was absolute torture to him.

When they went back again to the white room he sat down at the piano, glad to find a temporary refuge in music from the embarrassment of her presence.

'He cannot have spoken to Wanda?' she

thought, uneasy for the first time, as she glanced at Sabran, who was playing with his usual *maestria* a concerto of Schubert's. With the plea that her long post journey had fatigued her, she asked leave to retire when half an hour had elapsed, filled with scientific and intricate melody, which had spared them the effort of further conversation. Her host and hostess accompanied her to the guest-chambers, with the courtesy which was an antique custom of the Schloss, as of all Austrian country-houses. Their leave-taking on the threshold was cold, but studied in politeness; the door closed on her, and Sabran and his wife returned along the corridor together.

His heart beat heavily with apprehension: he dreaded her next word. To his relief, to his surprise, she said simply to him:

'It is very early. I will go and write to Rothwand about the mines. Will you come and tell me again all you said about them? I have half forgotten. Or if you would rather do nothing to-night, I have other letters to look over, and I will go to my own room.'

'I will come there,' he said; and though he was well used to her strong self-control and forbearance, he felt amazed at the force of these now, and was moved to a passionate gratitude.

'Any other woman,' he thought, 'would have torn me asunder to know what there has been between me and her guest. She does not even speak; and yet God knows how she loves me! She trusts me, and she will not weary me, nor importune me, nor seem to suspect me with doubt. Who shall be worthy of that? How can I rid her house of this insult? The other shall go; she shall go if I put her out with public shame before my servants. Would to heaven that to kill such as she is were no more murder than to slay a vicious beast or a poisonous worm!'

He followed his wife into the octagon-room, where all her private papers were. There were details of a mine in Galicia which were disquieting and troublesome; on the previous day they had agreed together what to do, but before she had answered her inspector, fresh details had come in by the post-bag, whilst he had been chamois-hunting. She sat down and handed him these fresh reports.

'I do not think there is anything that will alter your decisions,' she said. 'But read them, and tell me, and I will then write.'

He drew the documents from her, and began to peruse them, but his hand shook a little as he held the papers; his eyes were not clear, his mind was not free. He laid them

down and looked at her; she was seated near him. She was paler than usual and her face was grave, but she seemed quite absorbed in what she did, as she added figures together, and made a quick *précis* of the reports she had received. Her left hand lay on the table as she wrote; on the great diamond of the *bague d'alliance*, the only gift which he had presumed to offer her on their marriage, the light was sparkling; it looked like a cluster of dewdrops on a lily. He took that hand on a sudden impulse of infinite reverence, and raised it to his lips.

She looked at him, and a mist of tears came into her eyes which were tears of pleasure, of relief, of restrained emotion comforted; the gesture gave her all the reassurance that she cared to have; she was sure then that Olga Brancka had never made him false to his honour and hers. She said nothing to him of what was foremost in the minds of both. She held the value of silence high. She thought that there were things of which merely to speak seemed a species of dishonour. A single word ill-said is so often the 'little rift within the lute which makes the music dumb.'

She went to rest content; but he was none the less ill at ease, disturbed, offended, and violently offended, at the presence of his temptress

under the roof of Hohenszalras. It was an outrage to all he loved and respected; an outrage to which he was determined to put an end. The only possible way to do so was to see his guest himself alone. He could not visit her in her apartments; he could not summon her to his; if he waited for chance, he might wait for days. The insolence which had brought her here would probably, he reasoned, keep her here some time, and he was resolved that she should not pass another night in the same house with his wife and his children.

Long after Wanda had gone to sleep he sat alone, thinking and perplexing himself with many a scheme, each of which he dismissed as impracticable and likely to draw that attention from his household which he most desired to avoid. He slept ill, scarcely at all, and rose before daybreak. When he was dressed he sent his man to ask Greswold to come to him. The old physician, who usually got up before the sun, soon obeyed his summons, and anxiously inquired what need there was of him.

'Dear Professor,' said Sabran, with that gracious kindliness which always won his listener's heart, 'you were my earliest friend here; you are the tutor of my sons; you are an old man, a wise man, and a prudent man. I want you to understand something without

my explaining it; I do not desire or intend the Countess Brancka to be the guest of my wife for another day.'

Greswold looked up quickly: he knew the character of Stefan Brancka's wife, he guessed the rest.

'What can I do?' he said simply. 'Pray command me.'

'Do this,' said Sabran. 'Make some excuse to see her; say that the chaplain, or that my wife, has sent you, say anything you choose to get admitted to her rooms in the visitors' gallery. When you see her alone, say to her frankly, brutally if you like, that *I* say she must leave Hohenszalras. She can make any excuse she pleases, invent any despatch to recall herself; but she must go. I do not pretend to put any gloss upon it; I do not wish to do so. I want her to know that I do not permit her to remain under the same roof with my wife.'

The old physician's face grew grave and troubled; he foresaw difficulty and pain for those whom he loved, and to whom he owed his bread.

'I am to give her no explanation?' he said doubtfully.

'She will need none,' said Sabran, curtly.

Greswold was mute. After a pause of some moments he said with hesitation:

'By all I have heard of the Countess Brancka, I am much afraid she will not be moved by such a message, delivered by anyone so insignificant as myself; but what you desire me to do I will do, only I pray you do not blame me if I fail. You are, of course, indifferent to her certain indignation, to her possible violence?'

'I am indifferent to everything,' said Sabran, with rising impatience, 'except to the outrage which her presence here is to the Countess von Szalras.'

'Allow me one question, my Marquis,' said Greswold. 'Is our lady, your wife, aware that the presence of her cousin's wife is an indignity to herself?'

Sabran hesitated.

'Yes and no,' he answered at last. 'She knew something in Paris, but she does not know or imagine all, nor a tithe part, of what Mdme. Brancka is.'

'I go at once,' said the old man, without more words, 'though of course the lady will not be awake for some hours. I will ask to see her maids. I shall learn then when I can with any chance of success get admittance. You will not write a word by me? Would it not offend her less?'

'I desire to offend her,' said Sabran, with a

vibration of intense passion in his voice. 'No; I will not write to her. She is a woman who has studied Talleyrand; she would hang you if she had a single line from your pen. If I wrote, God knows what evil she would not twist out of it. She hates me and she hates my wife. It must be war to the knife.'

Greswold bowed and went out, asking no more.

Sabran passed the next three hours in a state of almost uncontrollable impatience.

It was the pleasant custom at Hohenszalras for everyone to have their first meal in their own apartments at any hour that they chose, but he and Wanda usually breakfasted together by choice in the little Saxe room, when the weather was cold. The cold without made the fire-glow dancing on the embroidered roses, and the gay Watteau panels, and the carpet of lamb-skins, and the coquettish Meissen shepherds and shepherdesses, seem all the warmer and more cheerful by contrast. Here he had been received on the first morning of his visit to Hohenszalras; here they had breakfasted in the early days after their marriage; here they had a thousand happy memories.

Into that room he could not go this morning. He sent his valet with a message to his wife, saying that he would remain in his own

room, being fatigued from the sport of the previous day. When they brought him his breakfast he could not touch it. He drank a little strong coffee and a great glass of iced water; he could take nothing else. He paced up and down his own chambers in almost unendurable suspense. If he had been wholly innocent he would have been less agitated; but he could not pardon himself the mad imprudences and follies with which he had pandered to the vanities and provoked the passions of this hateful woman. If she refused to go he almost resolved to tell all as it had passed to his wife, not sparing himself. The three or four hours that went by after Greswold had left him appeared to him like whole, long, tedious days.

The men came as usual to him for his orders as to horses, sport, or other matters, but he could not attend to them; he hardly even heard what they said, and dismissed them impatiently. When at last the heavy, slow tread of the old physician sounded in the corridor, he went eagerly to his door, and himself admitted Greswold.

The Professor spread out his hands with a deprecating gesture.

'I have done my best. But may I never pass such a quarter of an hour again! She will not go.'

'She will not?' Sabran's face flushed darkly, his eyes kindled with deep wrath. 'She defies me, then?'

'She evidently deems herself strong enough to defy you. She laughed at me; she spoke to me as though I were one of the scullions or the sweepers; she menaced me as if we were still in the Middle Ages. In a word, she is not to be moved by me. She bade me tell you that if you wish her out of your wife's house you must have the courage to say so yourself.'

'Courage!' echoed Sabran. 'It is not courage that will be any match for her; it is not courage that will rid one of her; she knows the difficulty in which I am. I cannot betray her to her husband. No man can ever do that. I cannot risk a quarrel, a scandal, a duel with the relatives of my wife. I cannot put her out of the house as I might do if she had no relationship with the Vàsàrhely and the Szalras. She knows that; she relies upon it.'

'My lord,' said the physician very gently, 'will you pardon me one question? Is the offence done to the Countess von Szalras by Mdme. Brancka altogether on her side? Are you wholly (pardon me the word) blameless?'

'Not altogether,' said Sabran, frankly, with a deep colour on his face. 'I have been cul-

pable of folly, but in the sense you mean I have been quite guiltless. If I had been guilty in that sense, I would not have returned to Hohenszalras!'

'I thank you for so much confidence in me,' said Greswold. 'I only wanted to know so far, because I would suggest that you should send for Prince Egon and simply tell him as much as you have told me. Egon Vàsàrhely is the soul of honour, and he has great authority over the members of his own family. He will make his sister-in-law leave here without any scandal.'

'There are reasons why I cannot take Prince Vàsàrhely into my confidence in this matter,' said Sabran, with hesitation. 'That is not to be thought of for a moment. Is there no other way?'

'See her yourself. She imagines you will not, perhaps she thinks you dare not, say these things to her yourself.'

'See her alone? What will my wife suppose?'

'Would it not be better frankly to say to my lady that you have need to see her so? Pardon me, my dear lord, but I am quite sure that the straight way is the best to take with our Countess Wanda. The only thing which she might very bitterly resent, which she

might perhaps never forgive, would be concealment, insincerity, want of good faith. If you will allow me to counsel you, I would most strongly advocate your saying honestly to her that you know that of Mdme. Brancka which makes you hold her an unfit guest here, and that you are about to see that lady alone to induce her to leave the castle without open rupture.'

Sabran listened, stung sharply in his conscience by every one of the simple and honest words. When Greswold spoke of his wife as ready to pardon any offences except those of falseness and concealment his soul shrank as the flesh shrinks from the touch of caustic.

'You are right,' he said with effort. 'But, my dear Greswold, though I am not absolutely guilty, as you were led for a moment to think, I am not altogether absolutely blameless. I was sensible of the fatal attraction of an unscrupulous person. I was never faithless to my wife, either in spirit or act, but you know there are miserable sensual temptations which counterfeit passion, though they do not possess it; there are unspeakable follies from which men at no age are safe. I do not wish to be a coward like the father of mankind, and throw the blame upon a woman; but it is certain that the old answer is often still the true one, "The

woman tempted me." I am not wholly innocent; I played with fire and was surprised, like an idiot, when it burnt me. I would say as much as this to my wife (and it is the whole truth) if it were only myself who would be hurt or lowered by the telling of it; but I cannot do her such dishonour as I should seem to do by the mere relation of it. She esteems me as so much stronger and wiser than I am; she has so very noble an ideal of me; how can I pull all that down with my own hands, and say to her, "I am as weak and unstable as any one of them"?'

Greswold listened and smiled a little.

'Perhaps the Countess knows more than you think, dear sir; she is capable of immense self-control, and her feeling for you is not the ordinary selfish love of ordinary women. If I were you I should tell her everything. Speak to her as you speak to me.'

'I cannot!'

'That is for you to judge, sir,' said the old physician.

'I cannot!' repeated Sabran, with a look of infinite distress. 'I cannot tell my wife that any other woman has had influence over me, even for five seconds. I think it is S. Augustine who says that it is possible, in the endeavour to be truthful, to convey an entirely false im-

pression. An utterly false impression would be conveyed to her if I made her suppose that any other than herself had ever been loved by me in any measure since my marriage; and how should one make such a mind as hers comprehend all the baseness and fever and folly of a man's mere caprice of the senses? It would be impossible.'

Greswold was silent.

'You do not see how difficult even such a confession as that would be,' Sabran insisted, with irritation. 'Were you in my place you would feel as I feel.'

'Perhaps,' said Greswold. 'But I believe not. I believe, sir, that you underrate the knowledge of the world and of humanity which the Countess von Szalras possesses, and that you also underrate the extent of her sympathy and the elasticity of her pardon.'

Sabran sighed restlessly.

'I do not know what to do. One thing only I know—the wife of Stefan Brancka shall not remain here.'

'Then, sir, you must be the one to say so or to write it. She will heed no one except yourself. Perhaps it is natural. I am nothing more in the sight of a great lady like that than Hubert or Otto would be. She does not think I am of fit station to go to her as your ambassador.'

'You would disown her if she were your daughter!' said Sabran, with bitter contempt. 'Well, I will see her; I will say a word to the Countess von Szalras first.'

'Say all,' suggested Greswold.

Sabran shook his head and passed quickly through the suite of sleeping and dressing chambers to the little Saxe salon, where he thought it possible that Wanda might still be. He found her there alone. She had opened one of the casements and was speaking with a gardener. The autumnal scent of wet earth and fallen leaves came into the room; the air without was cold, but sunbeams were piercing the mist; the darkness of the cedars and the yews made the airy and brilliant grace of the eighteenth-century room seem all the brighter. She herself, in a sacque of brocaded silk, with quantities of old French lace falling down it, seemed of the time of those gracious ladies that were painted on the panels. She turned as she heard his step, a red rose in her fingers which she had just gathered from the boughs about the windows.

'The last rose of the year, I am afraid, for I never count those of the hothouses,' she said, as she brought it to him.

He kissed her hand as he took it from

her; she suddenly perceived the expression of distress and of preoccupation on his face.

'Is there anything the matter?' she asked; 'did you overstrain yourself yesterday on the hills?'

'No, no,' he said quickly; then added, with hesitation: 'Wanda, I have to see Mdme. Branecka alone this morning. Will you be angered, or will you trust me?'

For a moment her eyebrows drew together, and the haughtier, colder look that he dreaded came on her face; the look which came there when her children disobeyed or her stewards offended her, the look which told how, beneath the womanly sweetness and serenity of her temper, were the imperious habit and the instincts of authority inherited from centuries of dominant nobility. In another instant or two she had controlled her impulse of displeasure. She said gravely, but very gently:

'Of course I trust you. You know best what you wish, what you are called on to do. Never think that you need give explanation, or ask permission to or of me. That is not the man's part in marriage.'

'But I would not have you suspect——'

'I never suspect,' she said, more haughtily. 'Suspicion degrades two people. Listen, my love. In Paris I saw, I heard more than

you thought. The world never leaves one in ignorance or in peace. I neither suspected you nor spied upon you. I left you free. You returned to me, and I knew then that I had done wisely. I could never comprehend the passion and pleasure that some women take in hawks only kept by a hood, in hounds only held by a leash. What is allegiance worth unless it be voluntary? For the rest, if the wife of my cousin be a worse woman than I think, do not tell me so. I do not desire to know it. She was the idol of my dead brother's youth; she once entered this house as his bride. Her honour is ours.'

A flush passed over her husband's face. 'You are the noblest woman that lives,' he said, in a hushed and reverent voice. He stooped almost timidly and kissed her; then he bowed very low, as though she were a queen and he her courtier, and left her.

'That devil shall leave her house before another night is down!' he said in his own thoughts, as he took his way across the great building to Olga Brancka's apartments. He had the red autumn rose she had gathered in his hand as he went. Instinctively he slipped it within his coat as he drew near the doors of the guests' corridor; it was too sacred for him to have it made the subject of sneer or of a smile.

Wanda remained in the little Watteau room. A certain sense of fear—a thing so unfamiliar, so almost unknown to her—came upon her as the flowered satin of the door-hangings fell behind him, and his steps passed away down the passages without. The bright pictured panels of the shepherds in court suits, and the milkmaids in hoops and paniers, smiling amidst the sunny landscapes of their artificial Arcadia; the gay and courtly figures of the Meissen china, and the huge bowls filled with the gorgeous deep-hued flowers of the autumn season; the singing of a little wren perched on a branch of a yew, the distant trot of ponies' feet as the children rode along the unseen avennes, the happy barking of dogs that were going with them, the smell of wet grass and of leaves freshly dropped, the swish of a gardener's birch-broom sweeping the turf beneath the cedars—all these remained on her mind for ever afterwards, with that cruel distinctness which always paints the scene of our last happy hours in such undying colours on the memory of the brain. She never, from that day, willingly entered the pretty chamber, with its air of coquetry and stateliness, and its little gay court of porcelain people. She had gathered there the last rose of the year.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HE was so passionately angered against the invader of his domestic peace, he was so profoundly touched by the nobility and faith of his wife, that he went to Olga Brancka's presence without fear or hesitation, possessed only by a man's natural and honest indignation at an insult passed upon what he most venerated upon earth.

One of his own servants, who was seated in the corridor, in readiness for the Countess Brancka's orders, flung wide the door which opened into the vestibule of the suite of guest-chambers allotted to this most hated guest, and said to his master :

'The most noble lady bade me say that she waited for your Excellency.'

'The brazen wretch!' murmured Sabran, as he crossed the antechamber, and entered the small saloon adjoining it; a room hung with Flemish tapestries, and looking out on the Szalrassee.

Olga Brancka was seated in one of the long low tapestried chairs; she did not move or speak as he approached; she only looked up with a smile in her eyes. He wished she would have risen in fury; it would have made his errand easier. It was difficult to say to her in cold blood that which he had to say. But he loathed her so utterly as he saw her indolent and graceful posture, and the calm smile in her eyes, that he was indifferent how he should hurt her, what outrage he should offer to her. He went straight up to where she sat, and without any preface said, almost brutally:

'Madame Brancka, you affected not to understand my message through Greswold; you will not misunderstand me now when I repeat that you must leave the house of my wife before another night.'

'Ah!' said Olga Brancka, with nonchalance, moving the Indian bangles on her wrist, and gazing calmly into the air. 'I am to leave the house of your wife—of my cousin, who was once my sister-in-law? And will you tell me why?'

Sabran flushed with passion.

'You have a short memory, I believe, Countess; at least your lovers have said so in Paris,' he answered recklessly. 'But I think if your remembrance could carry you back to the last evening I had the honour to see you in your hotel, you will not force me to the brutality and coarseness of further explanation.'

'Ah!' she said tranquilly once more, in an unvaried tone, clasping her hands behind her head and leaning both backward against the cushions of her chair, whilst her eyes still smiled with an abstracted gaze. 'How scrupulous you are about trifles. Why not about great things, my friend? What does Holy Writ tell us? One strains at a gnat and swallows a camel. I have heard a professor of Hebrew say that the Latin translation is not correct, but——'

'Madame,' said Sabran sternly, controlling his rage with difficulty, 'pardon me, but I can have no trifling. I give you time and occasion to make any excuses that you please; but once for all, you will leave here before nightfall.'

'Ah!' said Olga Brancka, for the third time; 'and if I do not choose to comply with your desire, how do you intend to enforce it?'

'That will be my affair.'

'You will make a scene with my husband? That will be theatrical and useless. Stefan is

one of those men who are always swearing at their wives in private, but in public never admit that their wives are otherwise than saints. Those men do not mind being cheated, but they will never let others say that they are so : *amour-propre d'homme.*'

Sabran could have struck her. He reined in his wrath with more difficulty every moment.

'I have no doubt your psychology is correct, and has taught you all the weaknesses of our idiotic sex,' he said bitterly. 'But you must pardon me if I cannot spare time to listen to your experiences. The Countess von Szalras is aware that I have come to visit you, and I tell you frankly that I will not stay more than ten minutes in your rooms.'

'You have told her?'

A wicked gleam flashed from under her half-shut eyelids.

'I would have told her—told her all,' said Sabran, 'but she stopped me with my words unspoken. What think you she said, madame, of you, who are the vilest enemy, the only enemy, she has? That if you had graver faults than she knew she wished not to hear them. You were her relative, and once had been her brother's wife.'

His voice had sternness and strong emotion in it. He looked to see her touched to some

shame, some humiliation. But she only laughed a little languidly, not changing her attitude.

'Poor Wanda!' she said softly, 'she was always so exaggerated—so terribly *moyen âge* and heroic!'

The veins swelled on his forehead with his endeavour to keep down his rage. He did not wish to honour this woman by bringing his wife's name into their contention, and he strove not to forget the sex of his antagonist.

'Madame Brancka,' he said, with a coldness and calmness which it cost him hard to preserve, 'this conversation is of no use that I can see. I came to tell you a hard fact—simply this, that you must leave Hohenszalras within the next few hours. As the master of this house, I insist on it.'

'But how will you accomplish it?'

'I will compel you to go,' said Sabran, between his teeth, 'if I disgrace you publicly before all my household. The fault will not be mine. I have endeavoured to spare you; but if you be so dead to all feeling and decency as to think it possible that the same roof can shelter you and my wife, I must undeceive you, however roughly.'

She heard him patiently and smiled a little. 'Disgrace *me*?' she echoed gently. 'Count Brancka will kill you.'

Sabran signified by a gesture that the possibility was profoundly indifferent to him. He turned to leave her.

'Understand me plainly,' he said, as he moved away. 'I leave it at your option to invent any summons, any excuse, as your reason for your departure; but if you do not announce your departure for this afternoon, I shall do what I have said. I have the honour to wish you good-morning.'

'Wait a moment,' said Mdme. Brancka, still very softly. 'Are you judicious to make an enemy of me?'

'I much prefer you as an enemy,' said Sabran, curtly; and he added, with contemptuous irony, 'your friendship is far more perilous than your animosity; your compliments are like the Borgia's banquets.'

'Ah!' said Olga Brancka, once again, 'you are ungrateful like all men, and you are not very wise either. You forget that I am the sister-in-law of Egon Vàsàrhely.'

Sabran could never hear that name mentioned without a certain inward tremor, a self-consciousness which he could not entirely conceal. But he was infuriated, and he answered with reckless scorn:

'Prince Vàsàrhely is a man of honour. He would disown you if he knew that you offer

yourself with the shamelessness of a *déclassée*, and that you outrage a noble and unsuspecting woman, by forcing yourself into her home when you have failed in tempting her husband to offer her the last dishonour.'

Her face paled under the unveiled and unsparing insults, but she did not lose her equanimity.

'We are very like a scene of Sardou's,' she said, with her unchangeable smile. 'You would have made your fortune on the boards of the Français. Why did you not go there instead of calling yourself Marquis de Sabran? It would have been wiser.'

He felt as if a knife had been plunged through his loins; all the colour left his face. Had Vàsàrhely told *her*? No! it was impossible. They were mere chance words of a woman eager to insult, not knowing what she said. He affected not to hear, and with a bow to her he moved once more to leave the chamber. But her voice again arrested him.

'Tell me one thing before you go,' she said, very gently. 'Does Wanda know that you are Vassia Kazán?'

She spoke with perfect moderation and simplicity, not altering her posture as she lay back in her tapestried chair, but she watched him with trepidation. She was not altogether

sure of facts she had half-guessed, half-gathered. She had pieced details together with infinite skill, but she could not be absolutely certain of her conclusions. She watched him with eager avidity beneath her smiling calmness. If he showed no consciousness her cast was wrong; she would miss her vengeance; she would remain in his power. But at a glance she saw her shaft had pierced straight home. He had strong control and even strong power of dissimulation in need; but that name thrown at him stunned him as a stone might have done. His face grew livid, he stood motionless, he had no falsehood ready, he was taken off his guard: all he realised was that his ruin was in the grasp of his mortal foe. His hold on her was lost. His authority, his strength, his dignity, all fell before those two hateful words, 'Vassia Kazán!'

'He has told her!' he thought, and the blood surged in his brain and made him dazed and giddy. He had not told her. By private investigation, by keen wit, by careful and cruel comparison of various information, she had arrived at the conclusion that Vassia Kazán and he who had come from Mexico as the grandson of the Marquis Xavier de Sabran were one and the same. Certain she could not be, but she was near enough to certainty to dare to

cast her stone at a venture. If it missed—she was a woman. He could not kill or harm a woman, or call her to account.

Even now, if he had preserved his composure and turned on her with a calm challenge, she would have been powerless.

But he had lost the habit of falsehood; self-consciousness made him weak; he believed that Egon Vàsàrhely had betrayed him. His lips were mute, his tongue seemed to cleave to his mouth. A less keen-sighted woman would have read confession on his face. She was satisfied.

'You have not answered my question,' she said quietly. 'Does Wanda know it? Does such a saintly woman "compound a felony"? I believe a false name is a sort of felony, is it not?'

He breathed heavily; his eyes had a terrible look in them; he put his hand on his heart. For a moment the longing assailed him to spring upon her and throttle her as a man may a dangerous beast. He could not speak, a leaden weight seemed to shut his lips.

He never doubted that she knew his whole history from Vàsàrhely.

'It was an ingenious device,' she pursued, in her honeyed, even tones, 'but it was scarcely wise. Things are always found out some time

or another—at least, men's secrets are. A woman can keep hers. My dear friend, you are really a criminal. It is very strange that Wanda of all people should have made such a misalliance, and had such an imposture passed off on her! I belong to her family; I ought to abhor you; and yet I can imagine your temptation if I cannot forgive it. Still it was a foolish thing to do, not worthy a man of your wit; and in France, I believe, the punishment for such an assumption is some years' imprisonment; and here, you know (perhaps you do not know?), your marriage would be null and void if she chose.'

He made a movement towards her, and for the moment, though she was a woman of great courage, her spirit quailed before the look she met.

'Hold your peace!' he said savagely. 'Speak truth, if you can. What has Vàsàrhely told you?'

Vàsàrhely had told her nothing, but she looked him full in the face with perfect serenity, and answered—'All!'

He never doubted her, he could not doubt her; what she said was met by too full confirmation from his memory and his conscience.

'He gave me his word,' he muttered.

She smiled. 'His word to *you*, when he

is in love with your wife? The miracle is that he has not told her. She would divorce you, and after a decent interval I dare say she would marry him, if only *pour balayer la chose.* For a man so devoted to her as you are, you have certainly contrived to outrage and injure her in the most complete manner. *Mon beau Marquis!* to think how fooled we all were all the time by you. How haughty you were, how fastidious, how patrician!'

He leaned against the high column of the enamelled stove and covered his eyes with his hands. He was unnerved, unstrung, half-paralysed. The blow had fallen on him without preparation or defence being possible to him. His thoughts were all in confusion; one thing alone he knew—he, and all he loved, were in the power of a merciless woman, who would no more spare them than the *sloughi* astride the antelope will let go its quivering flesh.

She looked at him, and a contemptuous wonder came upon her that a man could be so easily beaten, so easily betrayed into tacit confession. She ignored the power of conscience, for she did not know it herself.

She thought, with scorn: 'Why did he not deny, deny boldly, as I should have done in his place? He would have twisted my weapon out of my hand at once. I know so little, and

I could prove nothing! But he is unnerved at once, just because it is true! Men are all imbeciles. If he had only denied and questioned me he must have found that Egon had told me nothing.'

And she watched him with derision.

In truth, she knew so little ; she had scarce more to guide her than coincidence and conjecture. She longed to know everything from himself, but strong as was her curiosity, her prudence and her cruelty were stronger still, and she admirably assumed a knowledge that she had not, guided in all her dagger-strokes by the suffering she caused.

Yet her passion for him which, unslaked, was as ardent as ever, became not the less, but the greater, because she had him in her power. She was one of those women to whom love is only delightful if it possess the means to torture. Besides, it was not himself whom she hated, it was his wife. To make him faithless to his wife would be a more exquisite triumph than to betray him to her.

'He would be wax in my hands,' she thought. A vision of the future passed before her, with her dominion absolute over him, her knowledge of his shame holding him down with a chain never to be broken. She would compel him to wound, to deceive, to torment his wife ;

she would dictate his every word, his every act; she would make him ridiculous to the world, so servile should be his obedience to her, so great should be his terror of her anger. He should be her lover, weak as water in all semblance, because the puppet of her pleasure. This would be a vengeance worthy of herself when she should see him kneel at her feet for permission for every slightest act, and she should scourge him as with whips, knowing he dare not rise; when she should say softly in his ear a thousand times a year: 'You are Vassia Kazán!'

She was silent a few moments, lost in the witchery of the vision she conjured up; then she looked up at him and said very caressingly, in her sweetest voice:

'Why are you so dejected? Your secret may be safe with me. You know—you know—I was willing even to be your friend; I am not less willing now. I told you that you were unwise to make an enemy of me. Wanda's regard would not outlive such a trial, but perhaps mine may, if you be discerning enough, grateful enough to trust to it. I know your crime, for a crime it is, and a foul one: we must not attempt to palliate it. When we last met you offended, you outraged me. Only a few moments since

you insulted me as though I were the lowest creature on the Paris asphalte. Yet all this I—I—should be tempted to forgive if you love me as I believe that you do. I love *you*, not as that cold, calm, unerring woman yonder may, but as those only can who know and care for no heaven but earth. Réné—Vassia—who, knowing your sin, your shame, your birth, your treachery, would say to you what I say? Not Wanda!'

He seemed not to hear, he did not hear. He leaned his forehead upon his arms; he was sunk in the apathy of an intense woe; only the name of his wife reached him, and he shivered a little as with cold.

At his silence, his indifference, her eyes grew alight with flame; but she controlled herself; she rose and clasped her hands upon his arm.

'Listen,' she murmured, 'I love you, I love you! I care nothing what you were born, what sins you have sinned; I love you! Love me, and she shall never know. I will silence Egon. I will bury your secret as though it were one that would cost me my life were it known.'

Only at the touch of her hands did he arouse himself to any consciousness of what she was saying, of how she tempted him. Then he shook off her clasp with a rude gesture; he looked down on her with the bitterest of scorn:

not for a single instant did he dream of purchasing her silence so.

'You are even viler than I thought,' he said in his throat, with a dreary laugh of mockery. 'How long would you spare me if I sinned against her with you? Go, do your worst, say your worst! But if you stay beneath my wife's roof to-night, I will drive you out of the house before all her people, if it be my last act of authority in Hohenszalras!'

'I love you!' she murmured, and almost knelt to him; but he thrust her away from him, and stood erect, his arms folded on his chest.

'How dare you speak of love to me? You force me to employ the language of the gutter. If Egon Vàsàrhely have put me in your power, use it, like the incarnate fiend you are. I ask no mercy of you, but if you dare to speak of love to me I will strangle you where you stand. Since you call me the wolf of the steppes you shall feel my grip.'

She fell a few steps backward and stretched her hand behind her, and rung a little silver bell. Absorbed in his own bitterness of thought he did not hear the sound or see the movement. She had already, between Greswold's visit to her and his master's, written a little letter:

'Loved Wanda,—Will you be so good as to come to me for a moment at once?—Yours,

'OLGA.'

She had said to one of her women, who was in the next apartment: 'When I ring you will take that note at once to my cousin, the Countess, yourself, without coming to me.' She had had no fear of leaving the woman in the adjoining room, who was a Russian, wholly ignorant of the French tongue, which she herself always used.

She recoiled from him, frightened for the moment, but only for that; she had nerves of steel, and many men had cursed her and menaced her for the ruin of their lives, and she had lived on none the worse. '*On crie—et puis c'est fini*,' she was wont to say, with her airy cynicism. Something in his look, in his voice, told her that here it would not finish thus.

'He will shoot himself if he do not strangle me, and he will escape so,' she thought, and a faint sort of fear touched her. She was alone before him; she had said enough to drive him out of all calmness and all reason. She had left him nothing to hope for; she had made him believe that she knew all his fatal past. If he had struck her down into the dumbness of death he would have been scarcely guilty.

But it was only for a moment that such a dread as this passed over her.

'Pshaw! we are people of the world,' she thought. 'Society is with us even in our solitude. Those violent crimes are not ours: we strike otherwise than with our hands.'

And, reassured, she sank down into her chair again, a delicate figure in a cloud of muslin of the Deccan and old lace of Flanders, and clasped her fingers gracefully behind her head, and waited.

He did not move; his eyes were fastened on her, glittering and cold as ice, and full of unspeakable hatred. He was deadly pale. She thought she had never seen his face more beautiful than in that intense mute wrath which was like the iron frost of his own land.

'When he goes he will go and kill himself,' she mused, and she listened with passionate eagerness for the passing of steps down the corridor.

But he did not stir; he was absorbed in wondering how he could deal with this woman so that his wife should be spared. Was there any way save that vile way to which she had tempted him? He could see none. From a passion rejected and despised there can be no chance of mercy. He had ceased altogether to think of himself.

To take his own life did not pass over his thoughts then. It would have spared Wanda nothing. His shame, told when he were dead, would hurt her almost more than when he were living. He had too much courage to evade so the consequences of his own acts. In the confusion of his mind only this one thing was present to it—the memory of his wife. All that he had dreaded of disgrace, of divorce, of banishment, of ruin, were nothing to him; what he thought of was the loss of her herself, her adoration, her honour, her sweet obedience, her perfect faith. Would ever he touch even her hand again if once she knew?

His remorse and his grief for his wife overwhelmed and destroyed every personal remembrance. If to spare her he could have undergone any extremity of torture he would have welcomed it with rapture. But it is not thus that a false step can be retrieved; not thus that a false word can be effaced. It, and the fate it brings, must be faced to the bitter end.

He had no illusions; he was certain that the woman who would have tempted him to be false to her would spare her nothing. He would not even stoop to solicit a respite for her from Olga Brancka. He knew the only price at which it could be obtained.

He stood there, leaning his shoulders on the

high cornice of the stove, his arms crossed upon his chest, repressing every expression or gesture that could have delighted his enemy by revelation of what he suffered. In himself he felt paralysed; he felt as though neither his brain nor his limbs would ever serve him again. He had the sensation of having fallen from a great height; the same numbness and exhaustion which he had felt when he had dropped down the frozen side of the Umbal glacier. Both he and she were silent; he from the stupefaction of horror, she from the eagerness with which she was listening for the coming of Wanda von Szalras.

After a short interval of her thirsty and cruel anxiety, the page, who was in waiting outside, entered with a note for his master.

Sabran strove to recover his composure as he stretched his hand out and took the letter off the salver. It contained only two lines from his wife:

'Olga asks me to come to her. Do you wish me to do so?'

A convulsion passed over his face.

'Oh! most faithful of all friends!' he thought with a pang, touched to the quick by those simple words of a woman whose fidelity was to be repaid by shame.

'Where is the Countess?' he asked of the

young servant, who answered that she was in the library.

'Say that I will be with her there in a few moments.'

The page withdrew.

Olga Brancka was mute; there was a great anger in her veiled eyes. Her last stroke had missed, through the loyalty of the woman whom she hated.

He took a step towards her.

'You dared to send for her then?'

She laughed aloud, and with insolence.

'Dare? Is that a word to be used by a Russian *moujik*, as you are, to me, the daughter of Fedor Demetrivitch Serriatine? Certainly, I sent for your wife, my cousin. Who should know what I know, if not she? Egon might make you what promises he would; he is a man and a fool. I make none. If you prevent my seeing Wanda, I shall write to her; if you stop her letters, I shall telegraph to her; if you stop the telegrams, I will put your story in the Paris journals, where the Marquis de Sabran is as well known as the Arc de l'Etoile. You were born a serf, you shall feel the knout. It would have been well for you if you had smarted under it in your youth.'

So absorbed was he in the memory of his wife, and in the thought of the misery about to

fall upon her innocent life, that the insults to himself struck on him harmless, as hail on iron.

'Spare your threats,' he said coldly. 'No one shall tell her but myself. You know her present condition; it will most likely kill her.'

'Oh, no,' said the Countess Brancka, with a little smile. 'Her nerves are of iron. She will divorce you, that is all.'

'She will be in her right,' he said, with the same coldness. Then, without another word, he turned and left her chamber.

'For a bastard, he crows well!' she said, loud enough to be heard by him, in the old twelfth-century French of the words she quoted.

Sabran went onward with a quick step; if he had paused, if he had looked back, he felt that he would have murdered her.

'Talk of the cruelty of men! What beast that lives,' he thought, 'has the slow unsparing brutality of a jealous woman?'

He went on, without pausing once, across the great house. So much he could spare his wife, he could save her from her enemy's triumph in her suffering; he could do as men did in the Indian Mutiny, plunge the knife himself into the heart that loved him, and spare her further outrage.

When he reached the door of the library, he

stopped and drew a deep breath. He would have gone to his death with calmness and a smile ; but here he had no courage. A sickening spasm of pain seemed to suffocate him. He knew that he met only his just punishment. If he could only have suffered alone he would not have rebelled against his doom. But to smite her !——

With greater courage than is needed in the battle-field he turned the handle of the door and entered. She was seated at one of the writing-tables with a mass of correspondence before her, to which she had been vainly striving to give her attention. Her thoughts had been with him and Olga Brancka. She looked up with the light on her face which always came there when she saw him after any absence, long or short. But that light was clouded as she perceived the change in his look, in his carriage, in his very features, which were aged, and drawn, and bloodless. She rose with an exclamation of alarm, as he came to her across the length of the noble room, where he had first seen her seated by her own hearth, and heard her welcome him a stranger and unknown beneath her roof.

'Wanda ! Wanda !' he said, and his voice seemed strangled, his lips seemed dumb.

'My God, what is it?' she cried faintly. 'Are the children——'

'No, no,' he muttered. 'The children are well. It is worse than death. Wanda, I have come to tell you the sin of my life, the shame of it. Oh! how will you ever believe that I loved you since I wronged you so?'

A great sob broke down his words.

She put her hand to her heart.

'Tell me,' she said, in a low whisper, 'tell me everything. Why not have trusted me? Tell me—I am strong.'

Then he told her the whole history of his past, and spared nothing.

She listened in unbroken silence, standing all the while, leaning one hand upon the ebony table by her.

When he had ceased to speak he buried his face in her skirts where he knelt at her feet; he did not dare to look at her. She was still silent; her breath came and went with shuddering effort. She drew her velvet gown from him with a gesture of unspeakable horror.

'You!—you!' she said, and could find no other word.

Then all grew dark around her; she threw her arms out in the void, and fell from her full height as a stone drops from a rock into the gulf below; struck dumb and senseless for the first time in all the years that she had lived.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWELVE hours later she gave premature birth to a male child, dead. Once in those hours when her physical agony lulled for a moment and her consciousness returned, she said to her physician:

'Tell him to send for Egon. Egon betrays no one.'

They were the first words she had spoken. Greswold understood nothing; but he saw that some great calamity had fallen on those he loved and honoured, and that her lord never came nigh her chamber, but only pacing to and fro the corridors and passages of the house, with restless, ceaseless steps, paused ever and again to whisper—'Does she live?'

'Come to her,' said the old man once; but Sabran shuddered and turned aside.

'I dare not,' he answered, 'I dare not. If she die, it is I who shall have killed her.'

Greswold did not venture to ask what had happened; he knew it must be some disaster of which the Countess Brancka was the origin or the messenger.

'My lady has spoken a few words,' he said later to his master. 'She bade me tell you to send for Prince Vàsàrhely. She said he would betray no one. I could ask nothing, for her agony returned.'

Sabran was silent; the thought came to him for the first time that it might be possible Olga Brancka had used the name of her brother-in-law falsely.

'Send for him yourself,' he said wearily. 'What she wishes must be done. Nothing matters to me.'

'I think the Prince is in Vienna,' said Greswold; and he sent an urgent message thither, entreating Vàsàrhely's immediate presence at Hohenszalras, in the name of his cousin.

Olga Brancka remained in her own apartments, uncertain what to do.

'If Wanda die,' she thought, 'it will all have been of no use; he will be neither divorced nor disgraced. Perhaps one might plead the marriage invalid, and disinherit the

children; but one would want so much proof, and I have none. If he had not been so stunned and taken off his guard, he might easily have defied me. Egon may know more, but if Wanda dies he will not move. He would care for nothing on earth. He will forget the children were Sabran's. He will only remember they were hers!'

No one who loved her could have been more anxious for Wanda von Szalras to live than was this cruellest of her enemies, who passed the time in a perpetual agitation, and, as her women brought her tidings from hour to hour, testified so much genuine alternation of hope and terror, that they were amazed to see so much feeling in one so indifferent usually to all woes not her own. She was miserably dull; she had no one to speak to; she had no lover, friend, rival, or foe to give her the stimulant to life that was indispensable to her. Even she did not dare to approach the man whose happiness she had ruined, any more than she would have dared to touch a lion wounded to the death. Yet she could not tear herself away from the scene of her vengeance.

The whole house was hushed like a grave; the servants were full of grief at the danger of a mistress they adored; even the young children, understanding that their mother was

in peril, did not play or laugh, but sat unhappy and silent over their books, or wandered aimlessly along the leafless gardens. They knew that there was something terrible, though they knew not what.

'What is death?' said Lili to her brothers.

'It is to go and live with God, they *say*,' answered Bela, doubtfully.

'But how can God be happy Himself,' said Gela, 'when He causes so much sorrow?'

'Our mother will never go away from us,' said the little Lili, who listened. 'They may call her from heaven ever—ever so much; she will not leave *us*.'

Bela sighed; he had a heavy, hopeless impression of death as a thing that was stronger than himself.

'Pride can do naught against death, my little lord,' one of the foresters had once said to him. 'You will find your master there one day.'

A day and a night passed; puerperal convulsions succeeded to the birth of the dead boy, and Wanda was unconscious alike of her bodily and her mental torture. The physicians, whom Greswold had summoned instantly, were around her bed, grave and anxious. The only chance for her lay in the magnificent health and strength with which nature had dowered

er. Her constitution might, they said, enable her to resist what weaklier women would have gone down under like boats in an ocean storm.

It was towards dawn on the second day when Egon Vàsàrhely arrived.

'She lives?' he said, as he entered.

'That is all,' said Greswold, with tears in his voice.

'Can I see her?'

'It would be useless. She would not know your Excellency.'

Sabran came forward from the further end of the Rittersaal, where the lights were burning with a yellow glare as the grey light of the dawn was stealing through the unshuttered windows.

'Allow me the honour of a word with you, Prince,' he said. 'I understand; you have come at her summons—not at mine.'

Greswold withdrew and left them alone. Vàsàrhely was still wrapped in the furs in which he had travelled. He stood erect and listened; his face was very stern.

'Did you give up my secret to your brother's wife?' said Sabran, abruptly.

'Can you ask that?' said Vàsàrhely. 'You had my word.'

'Mdme. Brancka knows all that you know. She said that you had betrayed me to her. She

would have told Wanda. I chose sooner to tell her myself. The shock has killed the child. It may kill her. Your sister in-law is here. If she used your name falsely it is for you to avenge it.'

'Tell me what passed between you,' said Prince Egon. His face was dark as night.

Sabran hesitated a moment. Even now he could not bring himself to disclose the passion which his enemy had conceived for him. It was one of those women's secrets which no gentleman can surrender to another.

'You are aware,' he replied, 'that Mdme. Brancka has been always envious of your cousin; always willing to hurt her. When she got possession of the story of my past she used it without mercy. She would have told my wife with brutality; I told her myself, hoping to spare her something by my own confession. Mdme. Brancka affirmed to me, twice or thrice over, that you had given her all the information against me.'

'How could you believe her? You had had my promise.'

'How could I doubt her?'

'It is natural you should know nothing of honour!' thought Vàsàrhely, but he did not utter what he thought. He saw that, dark as had been the crimes of Sabran against those of

his race, the chastisement of them was as great.

He said simply:

'You might sooner have doubted anything than have believed that I should entrust the Countess Brancka with such a secret, and have given her such a power to injure my cousin. How can she have learned your history? Have you betrayed yourself?'

'Never! Since she had it not from you, I cannot conceive how or where she learned it. Not a soul lives that knows me as ——'

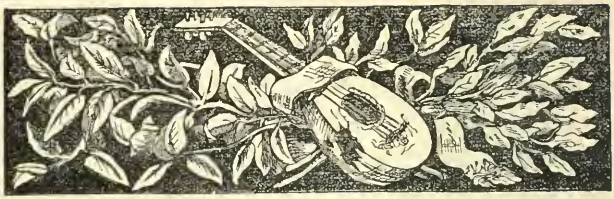
He paused; he could not bring himself to say the name he bore from birth.

'My brother is unfortunate,' said Vàsàrhely, curtly. 'He has wedded a vile woman. Leave her to me.'

He saluted Sabran with cold but careful ceremony, and went to his own apartments. Sabran passed to the corridor which led to his wife's rooms, and there resumed his miserable restless walk to and fro before her door. He dared not enter. In her conscious hours she had not asked for him. He had ever present before his eyes that movement of horror, of repulsion, with which she had drawn the hem of her gown from his grasp.

Now and again, when her attendants came in and out, he saw through the opening of the

door the bed on which she lay and the outline of her form in the pale light of the lamp. He could not rest. He could not even sit down or break a mouthful of bread. If she died, his sin against her would have slain her as surely as though his hand had taken her life. It was about six of the clock in the chilly dawn of the autumnal day.



CHAPTER XXXV.

EGON VÀSÀRHELY passed the next three hours in mental conflict with his own passions. It would have been precious to him—would have been a blessed and sacred duty—to avenge the woman he adored. But he had a harder task. For her sake he had to befriend the traitor who had wronged her, and shelter him from the just opprobrium of the world. Crueller combat with temptation none ever waged than he fought now against his own truest instincts, his own dearest affections. She lay there, perchance dying, of this treachery which had struck her down in her happiest hours; and it seemed to him as if, through the silence of the darkened and melancholy house, he heard her voice saying to him: 'For my sake, spare him—spare my children!'

'I give you more than my life, my beloved!' he murmured, as he sat alone, whilst the grey day widened over forest and mountain, and for her sake prepared to shield the man who had deceived her from disgrace and death.

'The hound!' he thought. 'He should be branded as a perjurer and thief throughout the world! Yet for her—for her—one must protect him.'

An hour or two later he sent his name to the Countess Brancka, with a request to be received by her. She was but then awaking, and heard with astonishment and alarm of his arrival, so unlooked for and so dreaded. It had never occurred to her as possible that he would come to Hohenszalras.

'Wanda must have sent for him!' she thought. 'Oh heavens! why could she not die with the child!'

It was impossible for her to avoid him; shut up here she could neither deceive nor escape him. She could not go away without her departure being known to the whole household. She was afraid of him, terribly afraid; the Vàsàrhely had a hand of iron when they were offended or injured. But she put a fair face on a bitter obligation, and, when she was dressed, went with a pretty smile into the salon to receive him.

Vàsàrhely gave her no greeting as he entered. A great fear took possession of her as she saw the expression of his eyes. He was the only living being of whom she was in awe. He approached her without any observances of courtesy. He said, simply and sternly:

'I hear that you have used my name falsely to the husband of Wanda; that you have dared to give me as your authority for accusations against him. What is your excuse?'

She was for the moment so bewildered and disturbed by his presence and his charge that she lost all her ability and power of interminable falsehood. She was silent, and he saw her bosom heave and her hands tremble a little.

'What is your excuse?' he said again. 'Why did you come into this house to injure Wanda von Szalras? How did you dare to use my name to do her that injury?'

She tried to laugh a little, but she was nervous and thrown off her guard.

'I wished to do her a service! Since she has married an adventurer—an impostor—she ought to know it and be free.'

'What is your authority for calling the Marquis de Sabran an adventurer? To him you employed my name as your authority. What truth was beneath that lie?'

She was silent. For the only time in her

life she knew not what to say. She had no facts in her hands. Her ground was too uncertain to sustain her in a steady attitude.

'You know that he is Vassia Kazán!' she said, with another little laugh.

The face of Vàsàrhely revealed nothing.

'Who is Vassia Kazán?' he repeated.

'He is—the man who robbed you of Wanda.'

'He could not rob me of what I never possessed. What grounds have you for calling him by this name?'

'I have reason to believe it.'

'Reason to believe it! You told him that you heard this story from myself.'

'He never denied it.'

'I am not concerned to discuss what he did or did not do. I come here to know on what grounds you employed my name?'

'Egon, I will tell you the truth!'

'Can you?'

'Yes; I can and I will. When I was at Taróc, three summers ago, I saw a fragment of a letter in Sabran's writing. I saw the name of Vassia Kazán. I put this and that together. I heard something from Russia; I sent some people to Mexico. I had always had my suspicions. I do not say I have any positive legal proof, but I am morally convinced that he is

no Marquis de Sabran, and that he was born a serf near the city of Kazán. I have charged him with it, and he has as good as confessed it. He was struck dumb with consciousness.'

She watched the face of Vàsàrhely, but it might have been cast in bronze for anything that it told her.

'You saw a fragment of a letter, of which you knew nothing,' he said coldly; 'you formed some vague suspicions; you descended to the use of spies, and, because you have invented a theory of your own on your so-called discoveries, you deem you have a title to ruin the happiness of your cousin's home. And you father your work upon me! Often have I pitied my brother, but never so deeply as now.'

'If my so-called discoveries were false,' she interrupted, with hardihood, 'why did he not say so? He was convicted by his own admissions. If my charge had been baseless, would he have said that he would tell his wife himself rather than let her learn it from me?'

'I neither know nor care what he said,' answered Vásárhely. 'I have only your version for it. You must pardon me if I do not attach implicit credence to your word. What I do know is that you ventured to use my name to give force and credibility to your accusations. Had you really known for cer-

tainty such a history, you would, had you had any decency or feeling, have consulted your husband and myself on the best means of shielding our cousin's honour. But you have always envied and hated her. What is her husband to you—what is it to you whether he be a noble or a clown? You snatch at the first brand you think you see, in the hope to scorch her honour with it. But when you used my name falsely you did a dangerous thing for yourself. I shall waste no more words upon you, but you will sign what I write now, or you will repent it.'

She affected to laugh.

'My dear Egon, *quel ton de maître!* What authority have you over me? Even if you invest yourself in your brother's, that counts for very little, I assure you.'

'Perhaps so; but if my brother be too careless of his honour and too credulous of your deceptions, he is yet man enough to resent such infamy as you have been guilty of now. You will sign this.'

He passed to her a few lines which he had already written and brought with him. They ran thus:

'I, Olga, Countess Brancka, do acknowledge that I most untruthfully used the name of my husband's brother, the Prince Vàsàrhely, in an

endeavour to injure the gentleman known as the Marquis de Sabran; and I hereby do ask the pardon of them both, and confess that in such pardon I receive great leniency and forbearance.'

'Sign it,' said Prince Egon.

'Pshaw!' said Mdme. Brancka, and pushed it away with a loud laugh, deigning no further answer.

'Will you sign it or not?' asked Vasàrhely.

She replied by tearing it in shreds.

'It is easily rewritten,' he said, unmoved. He went to a writing-table that stood in the room, looked for paper and found it, and wrote out the same formula.

'Do not be foolish, Olga,' he said curtly, as he returned. 'You are a clever woman, and always consult your own interests. I dare say you have done a thousand things as base as your attempt to ruin my cousin's happiness, but I do not suppose you have often done anything so unwise. You will sign this at once, or you will regret it very greatly.'

'Why should I sign it?' she said insolently. 'The man is what I say; he could not deny it. If I only guessed at the truth, I guessed aright. I wonder that you do not see *your* interests lie in exposing him. When the

world knows he is an impostor Wanda will divorce him and put the children under other names in religious houses. Then you will be able to marry her. I told him she would marry you *pour balayer la honte*.'

For the moment she was alarmed at the fires that leapt from Vàsàrhely's sombre eyes. It cost him much—as much as it had cost Sabran—not to strike her where she stood. He paused a second to control himself, then answered her coldly and calmly—

'My cousin will never seek a divorce, nor shall I wed with a divorced woman. Your hate misleads you; there is no blinder thing than hate. You will sign this paper, or I shall telegraph for my brother.'

'For Stefan!'

All her boundless indifference to her husband, and her contempt for him, were spoken in the accent she gave his name.

'For Stefan. You are pleased to despise him because you can lead him into mad follies, and can make him believe you are an innocent woman. But Stefan is not altogether the ignoble dupe you think him. He is a dupe, wiser men than he have been so; but he would not bear your infidelity to him if he really knew it, nor would he bear other things if he knew of them. Two years ago you took

two hundred thousand florins' worth of diamonds, in my name, from my jeweller Landsee in the Graben. How should a tradesman suspect that a Countess Brancka was dishonest? At the end of the year he brought his bill for that and other things to me, whilst I was in Vienna. He had never, of course, doubted that you went on my authority. Equally, of course, I did not betray you, but paid the amount. When you do such things you should not give written orders. They remain against you. Now, if Stefan knew this, or if he knew that you had taken money from the richest of your lovers, the young Duc de Blois, as I knew it so long as seven years ago, you would no longer find him the malleable easily-cozened fool you deem him. You would learn that he has Vàsàrhely blood in him. I have only named two out of the many questionable facts I know against you. They have been safe with me. I would never urge Stefan to a public scandal. But, unless you sign this, and apologise for using my name to the husband of my cousin, as you used it to Landsee of the Graben, I shall tell my brother. He will not divorce you. That is not our way; we do not go to lawyers to redress our wrongs. But he will compel you to retire for your life into a religious house—as you would compel the

harmless children of Wanda; or he would imprison you himself in one of our lonely places in the mountains, where you would cry in vain for your lovers, and your friends, and your *menus plaisirs*, and none would hear you. Do not mistake me. You have often called us barbaric; you will find we can be so. As I say, we do not carry our wrongs to lawyers. We can avenge ourselves.'

She had lost all colour as he spoke. A nervous spasm of laughter contracted her mouth, and remained on it like the ghastly *rictus* of death. She knew him well enough to know that he meant every syllable he said. The Vàsàrhely had had stern tragedies in their annals, and to women impure and unfaithful had been merciless as Othello.

She felt that she was vanquished; that she would have to obey him or suffer worse things. But though she was aware of her own impotence, she could not resist a retort that should sting him.

'You are very chivalrous! I always knew you had an insane adoration of your cousin, but I never should have thought you would have put on sabre and spurs in her husband's defence. Will he reward you by effacing himself? Will he end as he has begun, like the hero of a melodrama at the Gymnase, and shoot

himself at Wanda's feet? You would marry a widow, though you would not marry a divorced woman!'

'Some time ago, when we spoke of him,' he replied, still with stern self-control, 'I told you that were his honour called in question I would defend it as I would my brother's—not for his sake, for hers. I would, for her sake, defend it so were he the guiltiest soul on earth. He belongs to her. He is sacred to me. You mistake if you deem her such a woman as yourself. She has loved him. She will love no other whilst she lives. She has given herself to him. She will give herself to no other, though she outlive him from this hour. You make your calculations unwisely, for when you make them you suppose that every man and every woman have your own dishonesty, your own passions, your own baseness. You are short of sight, because you only see in the circle of your own conceptions.'

She understood that he knew the secret of the man he protected, but that he would never admit that he did so; would never reveal it or let any other reveal it. She understood that he had himself forborne from its exposure, and would never, whilst he lived, allow any other to hold it up to the derision of the world. She understood that, if need were, Vàsàrhely would defend, as he said, the honour of his

cousin's husband at the point of the sword against all foes or mockers.

'For her sake!' she cried, 'always for her sake! What can you both see so marvellous in her? She has been a greater fool than any woman that has ever lived, though she can read Greek and write in Latin! What has she done with all her wisdom and her holiness? You know as well as though it were written there upon the wall that he is what I say. Why do you put your lance in rest for him? Why are you ready to shed blood on his behalf? He is an impostor who has taken in first the world and then the mistress of Hohenszalras. If you were the hero you have always seemed to me you would tear his heart out of his breast, shoot him like a wolf in these very woods! If her honour is yours, avenge her dishonour!'

She spoke with force and fire, and longing to behold the spirit of evil roused in her hearer's soul and stung to action.

But she might as well have tried to move the mountains from their base as rouse either pain or rage in her brother-in-law. Vàsàrhely kept his attitude of stern, cold, contemptuous disgust. Not a muscle of his face changed. He said merely:

'You have been told what I shall do if you

do not sign this paper. The choice is yours. If you desire to hear any more episodes of your past I can tell you many.'

Then she changed her attitude and her eloquence. She dissolved in tears; she wept; she implored; she tried to kneel to him. But he was inflexible.

'You are a good actress,' he said simply. 'But you forget; it is Stefan whom you can deceive, not me.'

When she had vainly used all her resources of alternate entreaty and invective, of cajolery and insolence, she sank into her chair, exhausted, hysterical, nerveless.

'I am ill; call my woman,' she said faintly.

He replied:

'You are no more ill than I am.'

'You are brutal, Egon,' she said, raising herself, with flashing eyes and hissing tongue.

'What have you been to her?' said Vàsàrhely.

He waited with cold, inflexible patience. When another half-hour had gone by she signed the paper, and flung it with fury to him.

'You know very well it is true!' she cried, as she leaned across the table like a slender

snake that darted. 'Would she lie dying of it if it were only a lie?'

'That I know not,' said Vàsàrhely, coldly. 'What I know is that your carriage will be ready in an hour, and that you will go hence. If ever you be tempted to speak of what has occurred here, you will remember that my silence to Stefan and your own people is only conditional on yours on another matter.'

Then he left her.

She was cowed, intimidated, vanquished. When the hour was over she went through the two lines of bowing servants, and left Hohen-szalras ere the noon was past.

'It is the first time in my life I ever failed,' she thought, as the pinnacles and towers of the burg were lost to her sight. 'What do these men see in that woman?'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

VÀSÀRHELY, when he left her, went straight to Sabran, who, seated on an oaken bench in the corridor of his wife's apartments, knew not how the hours passed, and seemed aged ten years in a day. Vàsàrhely motioned him to pass into one of the empty chambers. There he gave him the lines which Olga Brancka had signed.

'You are safe from her,' he said. 'She cannot tell your story to the world. She will not dare even to whisper it as a conjecture.'

Sabran did not speak. This great debt owed to his greatest foe hurt him even whilst it delivered him.

'For the first time I have concealed the truth,' pursued Vàsàrhely. 'I affected to dis-

believe her story. There was no other way to save it from publicity. That alone would not have sufficed, but I had means to coerce her.'

'You have been very generous.'

Vàsàrhely shrank from his praise as though from some insolence. He did not look at Sabran; he spoke briefly between his closed teeth. All his soul was full of longing to strike this man; to meet him in open combat and to kill him; forcing him and his foul secret together down underneath the sole sure cover of the grave. But the sense that so near, within a few feet of them, she lay in peril of her life, made even vengeance seem for the moment profane and blasphemous.

'There will be always time," he thought.

That hushed and darkened chamber hard by awed his hatred into silence. What would she wish? What would she command? Could he but know that, how clear would be his path!

He hesitated a moment, then turned away.

'I shall wait here until the danger is past, or she is called to God,' he said hoarsely.

Then he walked away down the corridor slowly, like a man wounded with a wound that bleeds within.

Sabran stood awhile where he had left him, his eyes bent on the ground, his heart sick with shame.

'*He* was worthy of her!' he thought with the most bitter pang of his life.

Three more days and nights passed; they were to him like a hideous night-mare; at times he thought with horror that he would lose his reason. The dreadful stillness, the dreadful silence, the knowledge that death was so near that bed which he dared not approach, the impossibility of learning what memories of him, what hatred of him, might not be haunting the stupor in which she lay, together made up a torture to which her bitterest reproach, her deadliest punishment would have seemed merciful.

All through that exhaustion, in which they believed her mind was without consciousness, the memory of all that he had told her was alive in it, in that poignant remembrance which the confusion of a dulled brain only makes but the more terrible, turning and changing what it suffers from into a thousand shapes. In her worst agony this consciousness never left her; she kept silence because in her uttermost weakness she was strong enough not to give her woe to the ears of the others, but in her heart there seemed a great knife plunged, a knife rusted with blood that was dishonoured.

When she knew that the child she bore was

dead, she felt no sorrow, she thought only—'Begotten of a serf, of a coward!'

The intolerable outrage, the intolerable deception, were like flames of fire that seemed to eat up her life; her love for him, for the hour at least, had been stunned and ceased to speak. To the woman who came of the races of Szalras and Vàsàrhely, the dishonour covered every other memory.

'All his life only one long lie!' she thought.

Her race had been stainless through a thousand years of chivalry and heroism, and she—its sole descendant—had sullied it with the blood of a base-born impostor!

Whilst she lay sunk in what they deemed a perfect apathy, the disgrace done to her, to her name, to her ancestry, was ever present to her mind: a spectre which no one saw save herself. Every other emotion was for the time quenched in that. She felt as though the whole world had struck her on the cheek and she was powerless to resent or to revenge the blow. In hours of delirium she thought she saw all the men and women of her race who had reigned there before her standing about her bed, and saying: 'You held our honour, and what did you do with it? You let it sink to the earth in the arms of a nameless coward.'

One night she said suddenly: 'My cousin—is he here?'

When they told her that he had remained at Hohenszalras she seemed reassured. At sunrise she asked the same question. When they answered with the same affirmative, she said: 'Bid him come to me.'

They fetched him instantly. As he passed Sabran in the corridor he paused.

'Your wife has sent for me,' he said; 'have I your permission to see her?'

Sabran bent his head, but his heart beat thickly with the only jealousy he had ever felt. She asked for Egon Vàsàrhely in her stupor of misery, and he, her husband, had lost the right to enter her chamber, dared not approach her presence!

'Wanda, I am here!' said Vàsàrhely, softly, as he bent over her. She looked at him with eyes full of unspeakable agony.

'Is it true?' she murmured.

'Yes!' he said bitterly between his teeth.

'And you knew it?'

'Too late! But Wanda—my beloved Wanda—trust to me. The world shall never hear it.'

Her eyes had closed, a shiver ran through all her frame. 'Olga?' she muttered.

'She is in my power. I will deal with her,' he answered. 'She will be silent as the grave.'

She gave a long shuddering sigh, and her head sank back upon her pillows.

Vàsàrhely fell on his knees beside her bed, and buried his face on her hands.

'My violated saint!' he murmured. 'Fear not; I will avenge you.'

Low though the words were, they reached and moved her in her dim blind weakness. She stretched out her hand, and touched his bowed head.

'No, no—not *that*. He is my children's father. He must be sacred; give me your word, Egon, there shall be no bloodshed between him and you.'

'I am your next friend,' he said, with intense appeal in his voice. 'You are insulted and dishonoured—your race is affronted and stained—who should avenge that if not I, your kinsman? There is no male of your house. It falls to me.'

All the manhood and knighthood in him were athirst for the life of the impostor who had dishonoured what he adored.

'Promise me,' she said again.

'Your brothers are dead,' he muttered. 'I may well stand in their place. Their swords

would have found him out ere he were an hour older.'

She raised herself with a supreme effort, and through the pallor and misery of her face there came a momentary flash of anger, a momentary flash of the old spirit of command.

'My brothers are dead, and I forbid any other to meddle with my life. If anyone slew him it would be I—I—in my own right.'

Her voice had been for the instant stern and sustained, but physical faintness overcame her; her lips grew grey, and the darkness of great weakness came before her sight.

'I forbid you! I forbid you!' she said, as her breath failed her.

Vàsàrhely remained kneeling beside her bed. His shoulders trembled with restrained emotion. Even now she shut him out of her life. She denied him the right to be her champion and avenger.

She moved her hand towards him as a blind woman would have done.

'Give me your word.'

'You are my law,' he answered. 'I will do nothing that you forbid.'

She inclined her head with a feeble gesture of recognition of the words. He rose slowly, kissed the white fingers that lay near him, and, without speaking, left her presence.

'Bloodshed, bloodshed!' she thought, in the vague feverish confusion of half-conscious thought. 'Though rivers of blood rolled between him and me what could they wash away of the shame that is with me for ever? What could death do? Death could blot out nothing.'

A sense of awful impotence lay upon her like a weight of iron. Do what she would she could never change the past! Her sons must grow to youth and manhood tainted and dishonoured in her sight. There were times when all the martial and arrogant spirit in her was like flame in her veins, and she thought: 'Could I but rise and kill him—I, myself!'

It seemed to her that it would be but justice.

When Vàsàrhely, coming out from her chamber, passed the impostor who had done her this dishonour, it cost him the greatest self-sacrifice of his life not to order him out yonder in the chilly twilight of the leafless woods, to stand before him in that ordeal of combat which, in the code of honour of the Magyar Prince, was the sole tribunal to which a man of honour could appeal. But she had forbade him to avenge her. He felt that he had no share in her life sufficient to give him title to disobey

her. His own love for her told him that this offender was still dear enough to her for his life to be sacred in her sight.

'If I had not loved her,' he thought, 'I could have avenged her without suspicion; but what would it seem to her and to the world?—only that I slew him out of jealous rancour! In her soul she loves him still. Her hate will fade, her love will survive, traitor and hound though he be.'

He motioned Sabran towards one of the empty chambers in the gallery. When he had closed the door of it he spoke with a low, hoarse voice:

'Sir, I have the right as her kinsman, I have the right her brothers would have had, to publicly insult you, to publicly chastise you. But she has commanded me to abstain; she will have no feud between us. I obey her; so must you. I have but one thing to say to you. Once you spoke of suicide. I forbid you to follow up your crimes by causing the unending misery that death by your own hand would bring to her. You have been coward enough. Have courage at least not to leave a woman alone under the disgrace you have brought upon her.'

'Alone!' echoed Sabran. 'She will never admit me to her presence again. She will

demand her divorce as soon as ever she has strength to remember and to speak.'

'Do you know her so ill after nine years of marriage? Whatever she do it will be for you to accept it, and not evade your chastisement by the poltroon's refuge of oblivion in the grave. You have said you think yourself my debtor; all the quittance I desire is this. You will obey me when I forbid you to entail on your wife the lifelong remorse that your suicide--however you disguised it—would bring upon her. In obeying her, by holding back my hand from avenging her, I make the greatest sacrifice that she could have demanded. Make yours likewise. It would be easy for you to escape chastisement in death. You must forego that ease, and live. I leave you to your conscience and to her.'

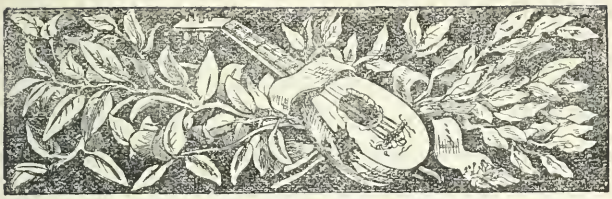
He opened the door and passed down the corridor, his steps echoing on the oaken floor.

In half an hour he had left the house, and gone on his lonely way to Taróc.

Sabran stood mute.

He had lost the power to resent; he knew that if this man chose to strike him across the eyes with his whip he would be within his right. The insults cut him to the bone as though the lash were on him; but he held his peace and bore them, not in submission, but in

silence. His profound humiliation, his absolute despair, had broken the nerve in him. He felt that he had no title to look a gentleman in the face, no power to defend himself, whatever outrages were heaped on him.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN time the convulsions ceased, the stupor lightened; they began to hope.

The danger had been great, but it was well-nigh past; the vigour and perfection of her strength had enabled her to keep her hold on life. After those few words to her kinsman she spoke seldom, she appeared sunk in silent thought; when the door opened she shrank with a sort of apprehension. Greswold watching her said to himself: 'She is afraid lest her husband should enter.'

She never spoke of him or of the children.

Sabran did not dare to ask to see her. When Greswold would fain have urged him, he refused with vehemence.

'I dare not—it would be to insult her more.

Only if she summon me—but that she will never do.'

'He has been faithless to her,' thought the old man.

All those weeks of her slow and painful restoration to life she was mute, her lips only moving in reply to the questions of her physicians. It seemed to her strange that when her spiritual and mental life had been poisoned to their source, her bodily life should be able mechanically to gather force, and resume its functions. Had matter so far more resistance than the soul?

Her women were frightened at the look upon her face; it had the rigidity, the changelessness of marble, and all the blood seemed gone out of it for ever.

In after days her heart would speak; remembered happiness, lost beliefs, ruined love, would in their turn have place in her misery; but now all she was sensible of was the unbearable insult, the ineffaceable outrage. She was like a queen who beholds the virgin soil of her kingdom invaded and wasted by a traitor.

Any other thing she would have pardoned —infidelity, indifference, cruelty, any sins of manhood's caprice or passion—but who should pardon this? The sin was not alone against

herself; it was against every law of decency and truth that ever she had been taught to hold sacred; it was against all those great dead, who lay with the cross on their breasts and their swords by their side, from whom she had received and treasured the traditions of honour, the purity of a race.

It was those dead knights whom he had smote upon the mouth and mocked, crying to them: 'Lo! your place is mine; my sons will reign in your stead. I have tainted your race for ever; for ever my blood flows with yours.'

The greatness of a great race is a thing far higher than mere pride. Its instincts are noble and supreme, its obligations are no less than its privileges; it is a great light which streams backward through the darkness of the ages, and if by that light you guide not your footsteps, then are you thrice accursed, holding as you do that lamp of honour in your hands.

So had she always thought; and now he had dashed the lamp in the dust.

Her convalescence came in due course; but the silence, almost absolute silence, which she preserved on the full recovery of her consciousness alarmed her physicians, who had no clue to the cause. Greswold alone, who divined that there was some wrong or disaster which severed her from her husband, guessed that this immutable

speechlessness was but the cover and guard of some great sorrow. No tears ever dimmed her eyes or relieved her bursting heart; she lay still, absorbed in mute and terrible retrospection. As her great weakness left her, there came upon her features the colder darker look of her race, the look which he who had betrayed her had always feared. She never spoke of him, nor of the children. Her women would have ventured to bring the children to her, unbidden, but Greswold forbade them; he knew that for the devoted tenderness she bore them to be thus utterly still and changed, some shock must have befallen her so great that the instincts of maternity were momentarily quenched in her, as water springs are dried up by earthquake.

'She never speaks of me, nor of them?' asked Sabran with agony every day of Greswold, and the old man answered him:

'She never speaks at all. She replies to our questions as to her health, she asks briefly for what she needs; no more.'

'The children are innocent!' he said wearily, and his heart had never gone forth to them so much as it did now, when they were shut out like himself from the arms of their mother.

Yet he understood how she shrank from them—might well almost abhor them—seeing in them, as Vàsàrhely saw, the living proofs of her surrender to a coward and a traitor.

'What can he have done?' mused Greswold. 'Infidelity, perhaps, she would not forgive; but it would not make her thus blind and deaf to the children.'

He passed his days in utter wretchedness; he wandered in the wintry woods for hours, or sat in weary waiting outside her door. He cared nothing what his household thought or guessed. He had forgotten every living creature save herself. When he saw his young sons in the distance he avoided them; he dreaded their guileless questions, the stab of their unconscious words. Again and again he was tempted to blow out his brains, or fling himself from the ice walls that towered above him; but the sense that it would seem to her the last cowardice—the last shame—restrained him.

Sometimes it seemed to him that the tie between them was so strong, the memories of their past passion so sweet, that even his crime could not part them. Then he remembered of what race she came, of what honour she was the representative and guardian, and his heart sank within him, and he knew that his offence was one beyond all pardon.

The whole household dimly felt that some great grief had fallen on their master. His attitude, his absence from his wife's room, the arrival of Prince Vàsàrhely, the abrupt depar-

ture of the Countess Brancka, all told them that some calamity had come, though they were loyally silent one to the other, their service having been always one of devotion and veneration for their mistress, since they were all Tauern-born people, bred up by their fathers in loyalty to Hohenszalras.

'The first who speaks of aught he suspects goes for ever,' old Hubert had said to his numerous *dienerschaft* in the hearing of them all, when one of the pages—he who had borne the note to his master in Olga Brancka's rooms—ventured to hint that he thought some evil was abroad, and would part their lord and lady. But all the faithful silence of their attendants could not wholly conceal from the elder children that something wrong, some greater sorrow even than their mother's illness, was hanging over the old house. They were dull and vaguely alarmed. They had not even the kindly presence of the Princess, who, if she sometimes wearied them with admonitions, treated them with tenderness, and atoned for her homilies by unending gifts. They were very unhappy, though they said little, and wandered like little ghosts among the wintry woods and in their spacious playrooms. They were tended, amused, provided for in all the same ways as usual. There

were all their pastimes and playthings ; all their comforts and habits were unaltered ; but from the background of their sports and studies the stately figure of their mother was missing, with her serene smile and her happy power of checking all dispute or turbulence with a mere word or a mere glance.

The winter had come at a stroke, as it does without warning oftentimes in the old Archduchy ; the snow falling fast and thick, the waters freezing in a night, the hills and valleys growing white and silent between a sunset and a sunset.

Their sledges carried them like lightning over the frozen roads, and their little skates bore them swift as circling swallows over the ice. It was the season Bela loved so well ; but he had no joy in anything. There was no twilight hour in the white-room at their mother's feet, whilst she told them legends and stories ; there was no moment in the mornings when she came into their study and found their little puzzled brains weary over a Latin declension or a crabbed page of history, and made all clear to them by a few lucid graphic sentences ; there was no possible hope that, when the day was broad and bright over the wintry land, she would call to them to bring the dogs and go with her and her black horses through the

glittering forests, where every bough was heavy with the diamonds of the frost. To the little boys it seemed as if the whole world had grown suddenly silent, and they were left all alone in it.

Their troops of attendants were no more consolation to them than his crowd of courtiers is to a bereaved sovereign.

Then, again, when Egon Vàsàrhely had by chance met them he had looked at them strangely, and had always turned away without a greeting. 'And when I was quite little he was so kind,' thought Bela, whose pride seemed falling from him like a useless ragged garment.

'It's all since Mdme. Olga came,' he said once to his brother. 'She is a bad, bad woman. She was rude to our mother.'

'I thought ladies were always good?' said Gela.

'They are much wickeder than men,' said Bela, with premature wisdom. 'At least, when they *are* wicked. I heard a gentleman say so in Paris.'

'What could she do when she was here, do you think?' asked Gela, with a tremor.

'I do not know,' said Bela, gravely and sadly. 'But I am sure that she hated our mother.'

He was sure that all the evil had come from

her; he had heard of evil spirits, the people believed in them, and had charms against them. She was one of them. Had she not tempted him to disobedience and revolt, with her pictures of the grand gaiety, the magnificent gatherings, the heart-rousing 'Halali!' of the Chantilly hunt?

Bela did not forget.

He would have cut off his little right hand, now, never to have vexed his mother.

He was yet more sorrowful still for his father. Though they were not allowed to approach their mother's apartments, he had disobeyed the injunction more than once, and had seen Sabran walking to and fro that long gallery, or seated with bent head and folded arms on one of the oaken benches. With all his boldness Bela had not dared to approach that melancholy figure; but it had haunted his dreams, and troubled him sorely as he rode and drove, and played and did his lessons. The snow had come on the second week of his mother's illness, and when he visited his riding-pony in its loose box on these frosted days on which he could not use it, he buried his face in its abundant mane, and wept bitterly, though he boasted that he never cried.

Eight weeks passed by after the departure of Olga Brancka before his mother could leave

her bed; and all that while, save for a brief question now and again as to their health, put to her physician, she had never mentioned the children once. 'She does not want us any more,' said Bela, with the great tears dimming his bold eyes.

In the ninth week she was lifted on to a great chair, placed beside one of the windows, and she turned her weary gaze on to the snow world without. What use was life? Why had it returned to her? All emotion of maternity, all memory of love, were for the time killed in her. She was only conscious of an intolerable indignity, for which neither God nor man could give her consolation.

She would have gone barefoot all the world over sooner than be again in his presence, had not the imperious courage which was the strongest instinct of her nature refused to confess itself unable to meet the man who had wronged her. In the long dark night which these past two months had seemed to her, she had brought herself to face the inevitable end. She had nerved herself to be her own judge and his. Weaker women would have made the world their judge; she did not. She did not even seek the counsel of that Church of which she was a reverent daughter. Her priest had no access to her.

'God must see my torture, but no other shall,' she said in her heart, nor should the world ever have her fate to make an hour's jesting wonder of, as is its way with all calamity. It would be her lifelong companion; a rusted iron for ever piercing deeper and deeper into her flesh; but she would dwell alone with it—unpitied. The men of her race had always been their own lawgivers, their own avengers; she would be hers.

Once she bade them bring her pens and ink, and she began to use them. Then she laid them down, and tore in two an unfinished letter. 'Only cowards write to save themselves from pain,' she thought, and. on the tenth day after she had risen from her bed she said to Greswold:

'Tell the women to leave me alone, and ask —my husband—to come here.'

She said the last words as if they choked her in their utterance. Her husband he was; nothing could change the past.

The old man hesitated, and ventured to suggest that any exertion was dangerous; would it be wise, he asked, to speak of what might agitate her? And thereon he paused and stammered, knowing that it was not his place to have observed that there was any estrangement between them.

She looked at him with suspicion.

'Have I spoken in my sleep or in my unconsciousness?' she thought.

Aloud she said only:

'Be so good as to go to him at once.'

He bowed and went, and to himself mused:

'Since she loves him, her heart will melt when she meets his eyes. His sin after all cannot be beyond those which women have forgiven a million times over since first creation began.'

Yet in himself he was not sure of that. The Szabras had had many great and many generous qualities, but forgiveness of offence had never been among them.

She remained still, her hands folded on her knees, her face set as though it were cast in bronze. The great bedchamber, with its hangings of pale blue plush and its silver-mounted furniture, was dim and shadowy in the greyness of a midwinter afternoon. Doors opened, here to the bath and dressing chambers, there to the oratory, yonder to the apartments of Sabran. She looked across to the last, and a shudder passed over her; a sense of sickness and revulsion came on her.

She sat still and waited; she was too weak to go further than this room. She was wrapped

in a long loose gown of white satin, lined and trimmed with sable. There were black bearskins beneath her feet; the atmosphere was warmed by hot air, and fragrant with some bowls full of forced roses, which her women had placed there at noon. The grey light of the fading afternoon touched the silver scroll-work of the bed, and the silver frame of one large mirror, and fell on her folded hands and on the glister of their rings. Her head leaned backward against the high carved ebony of her chair. Her face was stern and bitterly cold, as that of Maria Theresa when she signed the loss of Silesia.

He approached from his own apartments, and came timidly and with a slow step forward. He did not dare to salute her, or go near to her; he stood like a banished man, disgraced, a few yards from her seat.

Two months had gone by since he had seen her. When he entered he read on her features that he must leave all hope behind.

Her whole frame shrank within her as she saw him there, but she gave no sign of what she felt. Without looking at him she spoke, in a voice quite firm though it was faint from feebleness.

'I have but little to say to you, but that little is best said, not written.'

He did not reply; his eyes were watching her with a terrible appeal, a very agony of longing. They had not rested on her for two months. She had been near the gates of the grave, within the shadow of death. He would have given his life for a word of pity, a touch, a regard—and he dared not approach her!

She did not look at him. After that first glance, in which there had been so much of horror, of revulsion, she did not once look towards him. Her face had the immutability of a mask of stone; so many wretched days and haunted nights had she spent nerving herself for this inevitable moment that no emotion was visible in her; into her agony she had poured her pride, and it sustained her, as the plaster poured into the dry bones at Pompeii makes the skeleton stand erect, the ashes speak.

'After that which you have told me,' she said, after a moment's silence in which he fancied she must hear the throbbing of his heart, 'you must know that my life cannot be lived out beside yours. The law gives you many rights, no doubt, but I believe you will not be so base as to enforce them.'

'I have no rights!' he muttered. 'I am a criminal before the law. The law will free you from me, if you choose.'

'I do not choose,' she said coldly; 'you understand me ill. I do not carry my wrongs or my woes to others. What you have told me is known only to Prince Vàsàrhely and to the Countess Brancka. He will be silent; he has the power to make her so. The world need know nothing. Can you think that I shall be its informant?'

'If you divorce me——' he murmured.

A quiver of bitter anger passed over her features, but she retained her self-control.

'Divorce? What could divorce do for me? Could it destroy the past? Neither Church nor Law can undo what you have done. Divorce would make me feel that in the past I had been your mistress, not your wife, that is all.'

She breathed heavily, and again pressed her hand on her breast.

'Divorce!' she repeated. 'Neither priest nor judge can efface a past as you clean a slate with a sponge! No power, human or divine, can free *me*, purify *me*, wash your dishonoured blood from your children's veins.'

She almost lost her self-control; her lips trembled, her eyes were full of flame, her brow was black with passion. With a violent effort she restrained herself; invective or reproach seemed to her low and coarse and vile.

He was silent; his greatest fear, the torture of which had harassed him sleeping and waking ever since he had placed his secret in her hands, was banished at her words. She would seek no divorce—the children would not be disgraced—the world of men would not learn his shame; and yet as he heard a deeper despair than any he had ever known came over him. She was but as those sovereigns of old who scorned the poor tribunals of man's justice because they held in their own might the power of so much heavier chastisement.

'I shall not seek for a legal separation,' she resumed; 'that is to say, I shall not, unless you force me to do so to protect myself from you. If you fail to abide by the conditions I shall prescribe, then you will compel me to resort to any means that may shelter me from your demands. But I do not think you will endeavour to force on me conjugal rights which you obtained over me by a fraud.'

All that she desired was to end quickly the torture of this interview, from which her courage had not permitted her to shrink. She had to defend herself because she would not be defended by others, and she only sought to strike swiftly and unerringly so as to spare herself and him all needless or lingering throes.

Her speech was brief, for it seemed to her that no human language held expression deep and vast enough to measure the wrong done to her, could she seek to give it utterance.

She would not have made a sound had any murderer stabbed her body; she would not now show the death-wound of her soul and honour to this man who had stabbed both to the quick. Other women would have made their moan aloud, and cursed him. The daughter of the Szalras choked down her heart in silence, and spoke as a judge speaks to one condemned by man and God.

'I wish no words between us,' she said, with renewed calmness. 'You know your sin; all your life has been a lie. I will keep me and mine back from vengeance; but do not mistake—God may pardon you, I never! What I desired to say to you is that henceforth you shall wholly abandon the name you stole; you shall assign the land of Romaris to the people; you shall be known only as you have been known here of late, as the Count von Idrac. The title was mine to give, I gave it you; no wrong is done save to my fathers, who were brave men.'

He remained silent; all excuse he might have offered seemed as if from him to her it would be but added outrage. He was her

betrayer, and she had the power to avenge betrayal; naught that she could say or do could seem unjust or undeserved beside the enormity of her irreparable wrongs.

'The children?' he muttered faintly, in an unuttered supplication.

'They are mine,' she said, always with the same unchanging calm that was cold as the frozen earth without. 'You will not, I believe, seek to enforce your title to dispute them with me?'

He gave a gesture of denial.

He, the wrong-doer, could not realise the gulf which his betrayal had opened betwixt himself and her. On him all the ties of their past passion were sweet, precious, unchanged in their dominion. He could not realise that to her all these memories were abhorred, poisoned, stamped with ineffable shame; he could not believe that she who had loved the dust that his feet had brushed could now regard him as one leprous and accursed. He was slow to understand that his sin had driven him out of her life for evermore.

Commonly it is the woman on whom the remembrance of love has an enthralling power when love itself is traitor; commonly it is the man on whom the past has little influence, and to whom its appeal is vainly made; but here

the position was reversed. He would have pleaded by it: she refused to acknowledge it, and remained as adamant before it. His nerve was too broken, his conscience was too heavily weighted for him to attempt to rebel against her decisions or sway her judgment. If she had bidden him go out and slay himself he would gladly have obeyed.

'Once you said,' he murmured timidly, 'that repentance washes out all crimes. Will you count my remorse as nothing?'

'You would have known no remorse had your secret never been discovered!'

He shrank as from a blow.

'That is not true,' he said wearily. 'But how can I hope you will believe me?'

She answered nothing.

'Once you told me that there was no sin you would not pardon me!' he muttered.

She replied:

'We pardon sin; we do not pardon baseness.'

She paused and put her hand to her heart; then she spoke again in that cold, forced, measured voice, which seemed on his ear as hard and pitiless as the strokes of an iron hammer, beating life out beneath it.

'You will leave Hohenszalras; you will go where you will; you have the revenues of

Idrac. Any other financial arrangements that you may wish to make I will direct my lawyers to carry out. If the revenues of Idrac be insufficient to maintain you—— '

'Do not insult me—so,' he murmured, with a suffocated sound in his voice, as though some hand were clutching at his throat.

'Insult *you*!' she echoed, with a terrible scorn.

She resumed, with the same inflexible calmness :

'You must live as becomes the rank due to my husband. The world need suspect nothing. There is no obligation to make it your confidante. If anyone were wronged by the usurpation of the name you took it would be otherwise, but as it is you will lose nothing in the eyes of men ; society will not flatter you the less. The world will only believe that we are tired of one another, like so many. The blame will be placed on me. You are a brilliant comedian, and can please and humour it. I am known to be a cold, grave, eccentric woman, a recluse, of whom it will deem it natural that you are weary. Since you allow that I have the right to separate from you—to deal with you as with a criminal—you will not seek to recall your existence to me. You will meet my abstinence by the only amends you

can make to me. Let me forget—as far as I am able—let me forget that ever you have lived!'

He staggered slightly, as if under some sword-stroke from an unseen hand. A great faintness came upon him. He had been prepared for rage, for reproach, for bitter tears, for passionate vengeance; but this chill, passionless, disdainful severance from him for all eternity he had never dreamed of: it crept like the cold of frost into his very marrow; he was speechless and mute with shame. If she had dragged him through all the tribunals of the world she would have hurt him and humiliated him far less. Better all the hooting gibes of the whole earth than this one voice, so cold, so inflexible, so full of utter scorn!

Despite her bodily weakness she rose to her full height, and for the first time looked at him.

'You have heard me,' she said; 'now go!'

But instead, blindly, not knowing what he did, he fell at her feet.

'But you loved me,' he cried, 'you loved me so well!'

The tears were coursing down his cheeks.

She drew the sables of her robe from his touch.

'Do not recall *that*,' she said, with a bitter smile. 'Women of my race have killed men

before now for less outrage than yours has been to me.'

'Kill me!' he cried to her. 'I will kiss your hand.'

She was mute.

He clung to her gown with an almost convulsive supplication.

'Believe, at least, that *I* loved *you*!' he cried, beside himself in his misery and impotence. 'Believe that, at the least!——'

She turned from him.

'Sir, I have been your dupe for ten long years; I can be so no more!'

Under that intolerable insult he rose slowly, and his eyes grew blind, and his limbs trembled, but he walked from her, and sought not again either her pity or her pardon.

On the threshold he looked back once. She stood erect, one hand resting upon the carved work of her high oak chair; cold, stately, motionless, the furred velvets falling to her feet like a queen's robes.

He looked, then passed the threshold and closed the door behind him. He walked down the corridors blindly, not knowing whither he went.

They were dusky, for the twilight of the winter's day had come. He did not see a little

figure which was coming towards him until the child had stopped him with a timid outstretched hand.

'Shall we never see her again?' said Bela, in a hushed voice. 'It is so long!—so long! Oh, please do tell me!'

Sabran paused, and looked down on the boy with blood-shot burning eyes. For a moment or so he did not answer; then, with a sudden movement, he drew his son to him, lifted him in his arms and kissed him passionately.

'You will see her, not I—not I!' he said with a sob like a woman's. 'Bela, listen! Be obedient to her, adore her, have no will but hers; be loyal, be truthful, be noble in all your words and all your thoughts, and then in time perhaps—perhaps—she will pardon you for being also mine!'

The child, terrified, clung to him with all his force, dimly conscious of some great agony near him, but far beyond his comprehension or consolation.

'I love you, I will always love you!' he said, with his hands clasped around his father's throat.

'Love your mother!' said Sabran, as he kissed the boy's soft cheeks, made wet by hi

own tears; then he released the little frightened form, and went himself away into the darkness.

In a little time, with no word to any living soul there, he had harnessed some horses with his own hands, and in the fast falling gloom of the night had driven from Hohenszalras.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BELA heard the galloping hoofs of the horses, and ran with his fleet feet, quick as a fawn's, down the grand staircase and out on to the terrace, where the winds of the north were driving with icy cold and furious force over a world of snow. With his golden hair streaming in the blast, he strained his eyes into the gloom of the avenues below, but the animals had vanished from sight. He turned sadly and went into the Rittersaal.

'Is that my father who has gone?' he said in a low voice to Hubert, who was there. The old servant, with the tears in his eyes, told him that it was. A groom had come to him to say that their lord had made ready a sledge and driven away without a word to any one of them, while the night was falling apace.

Bela heard and said nothing; he had his mother's power of silence in sorrow. He climbed the staircase silently, and went and listened in the corridor where his father had waited and watched so long. His heart was heavy, and ached with an indefinable dread. He did not seek Gela. It seemed to him that this sorrow was his alone. He alone had heard his father's farewell words; he alone had seen his father weep.

All the selfishness and vanity of his little soul were broken up and vanished, and the first grief he had ever known filled up their empty place. He had adored his father with an unreasoning blind devotion, like a dog's; and this intense affection had been increased rather than repressed by the indifference with which he had been treated.

His father was gone; he felt sure that it was for ever: if he could not see his mother he thought he could not live. To the mind of a child such gigantic and unutterable terrors rise up under the visitation of a vague alarm. Abroad in the woods, or under any bodily pain or fear, he was as brave as a lion whelp, but he had enough of the German mystic in his blood to be imaginative and visionary when trouble touched him. The sight of his father's grief had shaken his nerves, and filled him with

the first passionate pity he had ever known. A man so great, so strong, so wonderful in prowess, so far aloof from himself as Sabran had always seemed to his little son, to be so overwhelmed in such helpless sorrow, appeared to Bela so terrible a thing that an intense fear took for the first time possession of his little valiant soul. His father could slay all the great beasts of the forests; could break in the horse fresh from the freedom of the plains; could breast the stormy waters like a petrel; could scale the highest heights of the mountains. And yet someone—something—had had power to break down all his strength, and make him flee in wretchedness.

It could not be his mother who had done this thing? No, no! never, never! It had been done because she was lying ill, helpless, perhaps was dead.

As that last dread came over him he lost all control over himself. He knew what death was. A little girl he had been fond of in Paris had died whilst he was her playmate, and he had seen her lying, so waxen, so cold, so unresponsive, when he had laid his lilies on her little breast. A great despair came over him, and made him reckless what he did. In the desperation of terror blent with love, he started up and ran to the door

of his mother's apartments. It yielded to his pressure; he ran across the ante chamber and the dressing-rooms, and pulled aside the tapestry.

Then he saw her; seated at the further side of the great bedchamber. There was a feeble grey light from the western sky, to which the casements of the chamber turned. It was very pale and dim, but by it he saw her lying back, rigid and colourless, the white satin, the dusky fur, the deep shadows gathered around her. There was that in her look and in her attitude which made the child's heart grow cold, as his father's had done.

She was alone; for she had bade her women not come unless she summoned them. Bela stood and gazed, his pulses beating loud and hard; then with a cry he ran forward and sprang to her, and threw his arms about her.

'Oh, mother, mother, you are not dead!' he cried. 'Oh, speak to me; do speak to me! He is gone away for ever and ever, and if we cannot see you we shall all die. Oh, do not look at me so! Pray, pray, do not. Shall I fetch Lili?——'

In his vague terror he thought to disarm her by his little sister's name. She had thrust him away from her, and was looking with cold and cruel eyes on his face, that was so like the face of his father. She was thinking:

'You are the son of a serf, of a traitor, of a liar, of a bastard, and yet you are *mine*! I bore you, and yet you are his. You are shame incarnate. You are the living sign of my dishonour. You bear my name—my untainted name—and yet you were begotten by him.'

Bela dropped down at her feet as his father had done.

'Oh, do not look at me so,' he sobbed. 'Oh, mother, what have I done? I have tried to be good all this while. He is gone away, and he is so unhappy, and he bade me never vex or disobey you, and I never will.'

His voice was broken in his sobs, and he leaned his head upon her knees, and clasped them with both his arms. She looked down on him, and drew a deep shuddering breath. The holiest joy of a woman's life was, for her, poisoned at the springs.

Then, at the child's clinging embrace, at his piteous and innocent grief, the motherhood in her welled up under the frost of her heart, and all its long-suffering and infinite tenderness revived, and overcame the horror that wrestled with it. She raised him up and strained him to her breast.

'You are mine, you are mine!' she murmured over him. 'I must forget all else.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE spring dawned once more on Hohenszalras, and the summer followed it. The waters leapt, the woods rejoiced, the gardens blossomed, and the children played; but the house was silent as a house in which the dead are lying. There was indeed a corpse there—the corpse of buried joy, of murdered love, of ruined honour.

The household resumed its calm order, the routine of the days was unbroken, the quiet yet stately life had been taken up in its course as though it had never been altered; and wherever young children are there will always be some shout of mirth, some sound of happy laughter somewhere; the children laugh as the birds sing, though those amidst them bury their dead.

But the house was as a house of mourning, and the sense of death was there as utterly as though he who was gone had been laid in his grave amidst the silver figures and the marble tombs in the Chapel of the Knights. No one ever heard a sigh from her lips, or ever saw the tears beneath her eyelids; but the sense of her bereavement, as one terrible, inconsolable, eternal, weighed like a pall on all those who were about her; the lowliest peasant on her estates understood that the sanctity of some untold woe had built up a wall of granite between her and all the living world.

She had always been grateful to fate for her old home set amidst the silence of the mountains, but she had never been so thankful for it as now. It shielded her from all the observation and interrogation of the world; no one came thither unbidden, unless she chose, no visitant would ever break that absolute solitude which was the sole approach to peace that she would ever know. Even her relatives could not pass the icy barrier of her cold denial. They wearied her for a while with written importunities and suggestions, hinted wonder, delicately expressed questions. But they made no way into her confidence; they soon left her to herself and to her children. They said angrily to themselves that she had been always whim-

sical and a solitary; they had been certain that soon or late that ill-advised union would be dissolved in some way, private or public. They were all people haughty, sensitive, abhorrent of scandal; they were content that the separation should be by mutual consent and noiseless.

She had had letters from Egon Vàsàrhely full of delicate tenderness; in the last he had asked with humility if he might visit Hohenszalras. She had written in return to him: 'You have my gratitude and my affection, but until we are quite old we will not meet. Leave me alone; you can do naught for me.'

He obeyed; he understood the loyalty to one disloyal which made her refuse to meet him, of whose loyalty she was so sure.

He sent a magnificent present to the child who was his namesake, and wrote to her no more save upon formal anniversaries.

The screen of her dark forests protected her from all the cruel comment and examination of the men and women of her world. She knew them well enough to know that when she ceased to appear amidst them, when she ceased to contribute to their entertainment, when she ceased to bid them to her houses, she would soon cease also to be remembered by them; even their wonder would live but for a day. If they blamed her in their ignorance, their blame

would be as indifferent as their praise had been.

She had been told by her lawyers that her husband had refused to touch a coin of the revenues of Idrac, and had once visited them to sign a power of procuration, whereby they could receive those revenues and set them aside in accumulation for his son Gela. That was all she heard. Whither he had gone she was ignorant. She did not make any effort to learn. On the night following his departure a peasant had been sent with the sleigh and horses home to Hohenszalras. The solicitors of Salzburg had seen him a week or two later at their ancient offices under the Calvarienburg: that was all. She had bade him let it be forgotten that he had ever lived beside her. He had obeyed her.

The days, and weeks, and months went on, and his place knew him no more. The jägers, seated round their fires in their forest-huts, spoke longingly and wonderingly of his absence. The hunters, when they brought down a steinbock with unusual effort or skill, said that it had been a shot that would have been worthy of his praise. His old friend wept for him with the slow sad tears of age, and the child Bela prayed for his return every night that he knelt down before his crucifix. But his name never

passed his wife's lips, and was never written by her hand. She had given her all with the superb generosity of a sovereign; she had in her wrongs the intense abiding unutterable disgust of a sovereign betrayed and outraged. When she let grief have its way, it was when no eyes beheld her, when the night was down and solitude sheltered her.

She had never spoken of what had befallen her to any human ear; not even to her priest's. The horror of it was buried in her own breast; its sepulchre all the waste and ashes of her perished joys.

When the Princess Ottilie, weeping, entreated to be told the worst, she answered briefly:

'He betrayed me. How, matters nothing.'

More than that she never said. The Princess supposed that she spoke of the disloyalty of the passions, and dared not urge her to more confidence. 'I warned him that she would never forgive if he were faithless,' she thought, and wept for hours at her orisons, her gentle soul resenting the inflexibility of this mute immutable bitterness of offended love.

Too proud and too delicate to intrude undesired into any confidence, and too tenderhearted to utter censure aloud to one she loved, the Princess showed in a thousand ways

without speech that she considered there were cruelty and egotism in her unexplained separation from her husband. Believing as she did that his offence was that conjugal infidelity which, however blameable, is one of those injuries which all women who love forgive, and which those who do not love endure in silence from patience and dignity, herself offended at her exclusion from all knowledge of the facts, she said but little; but her whole attitude was one of restrained reproach.

'With time she will change,' she said to herself. But time passed on, and she could see no change, nor any hope of it.

The grave severe beauty of their mother had a vague terror for her children. She never now smiled at their mirth, laughed at their sports, or joined in their pastimes. She was almost always silent. Bela longed to throw his arms about her knees, and cry out to her: 'Mother, mother, where is *he*?' But he did not venture to do so. Without his reasoning upon it, the child instinctively felt that her frozen calm covered depths of suffering which he did not dare disturb. He had been so completely terrified once, that the remembrance of that hour lay like ice upon his bright courage. Even the younger ones felt something of the same fear. Their mother remembered them,

cared for them, was heedful that their needs of body and of brain were perfectly supplied. But they felt, as young children feel what they cannot explain, that they were outside her life, insufficient for her, even fraught with intense pain to her. Often when she stooped to kiss them a shudder passed over her; often when they came into her presence she looked away from them, as though the sight of them stung and blinded her. They never heard an angry word from her lips, but even repeated anger would have kept them at less distance from her than did that mute majesty of a grief they could not comprehend.

She was more severe to all her dependants; she never became unjust, but she was often stern; the children at the schools saw her smile no more. Santa Claus still filled their stockings on Christmas Eve; but of the stately figure which moved amidst them, robed in black, they grew afraid. She seldom went to them or to her peasantry. Bela and Gela were sent with her winter gifts. In the summer the sennerins never now saw her enter their high huts and drink a cup of milk, talking with them of their herds and flocks.

She was tranquil as of old. She fulfilled the duties of her properties, and attended to all the demands made upon her by her people;

her liberalities were unchanged, her justice was unwarped, her mind was clear and keen. But she never smiled, even on her young daughter; and the little Lili said once to her brothers:

'Do you know, I think our mother is changing to marble. She will soon be of stone, like the statues in the chapel. When I touch her I feel cold.'

Bela was angered.

'You are ungrateful, you little child,' he said to his sister. 'Who loves us, who cares for us, who thinks of us, as our mother does? If her lips are cold, perhaps her heart is broken. We are only children; we can do so little.'

He had treasured the words of his father in his soul. He had never told them, except to Gela, but they were always present to him. He alone had seen and heard enough to understand that some dire disaster had shattered in pieces the beautiful life which his parents had led together. He had received an indelible impression from the two scenes of that evening. Without comprehending, he had felt that something had befallen them, which struck at their honour no less than at their peace. He had a clear conception of what honour was; it was the first tuition that Wanda von Szalras gave her children. Vague as his understanding of

their grief had been, it had been sufficient to strike at that pride which was inborn in him. He was like the Dauphin of whom he had thought in Paris. He had seen his father driven from his throne; he had seen his mother in the sackcloth and ashes of affliction. He was humiliated, bewildered, softened; he, who had believed himself omnipotent because all the people of the Iselthal ran to do his bidding, felt how helpless he was in truth. He was shut out from his mother's confidence; he had been powerless to console her or to retain his father; there was something even in himself from which his mother shrank. What had his father said? 'She will in time pardon you for being mine.' What had been the meaning of those strange words? And where had his father gone?

When the summer came and Bela rode through the glad green woods, his heart was heavy. Would his father never ride there any more? Bela had often watched, himself unseen, the fiery horse that bore the man he loved come plunging and leaping through bough and brake till it passed him as though the wind bore it. He had always thought as he had watched, 'When I grow up I will be just what he is'; and now that splendid and gracious figure which had been always present on

the horizon of his child's mind, magnified and glorified like the illuminated figures in the painted chronicles, was no more there—had faded utterly away in the dusk and the snow of that wintry twilight.

A thousand times was the question to his mother on his lips: 'Will he never come back? Shall we never see him again?' But he dared not speak it when he saw that look of a revulsion they could not comprehend always upon her face.

'He bade me never vex her,' Bela thought, and obeyed.

'I wonder if ever he think of us,' he said once to Gela, as their ponies walked down one of the grassy rides of the home woods.

'Perhaps he is dead,' said Gela, in a hushed, wistful voice.

'How dare you say that, Gela?' said his brother, angry from an intolerable pain. 'If he were—were—*that*, we should be told it. There would be masses in the chapel. We should have black clothes. Oh no! he is not dead. I should know it, I am sure I should know it. He would send down some angel to tell me.'

'Why do you care so much for him?' said Gela, very low. 'It must be he who has made our mother so changed, so unhappy; and it is

she whom we should love most. You say even he told you so.'

Bela's lips unclosed to loose an angry answer. He was thinking: 'It is she who sent him away, she who made him weep.' But his loyalty checked it; he would not utter what he thought, even to his brother.

'I think he would not wish us to talk of it,' he said gravely and sadly. 'We will pray for him; that is all we can do.'

'And for her,' said Gela, under his breath.

They were both mute, and let the bridles lie on their ponies' necks as they rode home quietly and sorrowfully in the still summer afternoon to the great house, which, with all its thousand casements gleaming in the sun, seemed to them so silent, so empty, so deserted now. Bela looked up at the banner, with its deep red and its blazoned gold streaming on a westerly wind. 'The flag would be half-mast high if it were *that*,' he thought, his heart wrung by the dread which Gela had suggested to him. He had seen the banner lowered when Prince Lilienhöhe had died.

On the lawn under the terrace the other children were playing with little painted balloons; the boys did not go to them, but riding round to the stables entered the house by the side entrance. Gela went to his violin, which

he loved better than any toy, and studied seriously. Bela wandered wearily over the building, tormented by the doubt which his brother had put in his thoughts. They were always enjoined to keep to their own wing of the house; but he often broke the rule, as he did most others. He walked listlessly along the innumerable galleries, and up and down the grand staircases, his St. Hubert hound following his steps. His face was very pale, his little hands were folded behind his back, his head was bent. He knew that the Latin and Greek for the morrow were all unprepared, but he could not think of them. He was thinking only: 'If it should be, if it should be?'

He came at last to the door of the library. It was there that his mother now spent most of her time. She took long rides alone, always alone; and often chose for them the wildest weather. When she was indoors, she passed her time in unremitting application to all the business of her estates. He opened the great oak door very softly, and saw her seated at the table; Donau and Neva, who now were old, were lying near her feet. She was studying some papers. The sunset glow came through the painted casements and warmed all the light about her, but by its contrast, her attitude, her expression, her features, looked only

the graver, the colder, the more colourless. Her gown was black, her pearls were about her throat, her profile was severe, her cheek, turned to the light, was pale and thin. She did not see the little gallant figure of her son in his white summer riding-clothes, and with his golden hair cut across his brows, looking like a boy's portrait by Reynolds.

He stood a moment irresolute; then he went across the long room and stood before her, and bowed as he knew he ought to do. She started and turned her head and saw the pallor of the child's face. She put out her hand to him; it was very thin, and the rings were large upon it. He saw a contraction on her features as of pain; it was but of a moment, because he looked so like his father.

'What is it, Bela?' she said to him. 'You ought not to come here.'

His lower lip quivered. He hesitated; then, gathering all his courage, said timidly:

'May I ask you just one thing?'

'Surely, my child—are you afraid of me?'

It struck her, with a sudden sense of contrition, that she had made the children afraid of her. She had never thought of it before.

Bela hesitated once more, then said boldly: Gela said to day *he* might be dead. Oh, if he

ever die, will you please tell me? I shall think of it day and night.'

Her face changed terribly; the darker passions of her nature were spoken on it.

'I have forbidden you to speak of your father, if it be him you mean,' she said sternly and very coldly.

But Bela, though frightened, clung to his one thought.

'But he may die!' he said piteously. 'Will you tell me? Please, will you tell me? He might be dead now—we never hear.'

She leaned her arm upon the table, and covered her eyes with her hand. She was silent. She strove with herself so as not to treat the child with harshness. Though he hurt her so cruelly, he was right. She honoured him for his courage.

'If you will only tell me that,' said the boy, with tears in his throat, 'I will never ask anything else—never—never!'

'Why do you cling so to his memory?' she said, with a sudden impatience of jealousy. 'He never took heed of you.'

'I was so little,' said Bela, with a sigh. 'But I loved him—oh! I have always loved him—and I was the last to see him that night.'

'I know!' she said harshly, ashamed meanwhile of her own harshness, for how

could the child suspect the torture his words were to her? What had his father given her beautiful boy?—disgraced descent, sullied blood, the heritage of falsehood and of dishonour. Yet the boy loved his memory better than he loved her presence. And the time had been, not so long passed, when she would have recognised the preference with fond and generous delight.

Bela stood beside her, his eyes watching her with timid interrogation, with longing appeal. The look upon his face went to her heart. She knew not what to say to him. She had hoped he would be always silent, and forget, as children usually forget.

'You are right to feel so,' she said to him at last, with a violent effort. 'Cherish his memory, and pray for him always; but do not speak of him to me. When you are grown to manhood, if I be living then, you shall hear what has parted your father and me; you shall judge us yourself. But there are many years to that; many weary years for me. I shall endeavour that they shall be happy ones for you; but you must never ask me, never speak, of him. I gave you that command that night; but you are very young, you have forgotten.'

Bela listened with a sinking heart. He

gathered from her words that his father's absence was, as he had feared, for ever.

'I had not forgotten,' he said in a whisper, for the moment was terrible to him. 'But if —if what Gela said should ever be, will you tell me that? I will not disobey again, but pray—pray—tell me *that*.'

His mother's face seemed to him to grow colder and colder, paler and paler, till she scarcely looked a living woman.

'I will tell you—if I know,' she said, with a pause between each slow spoken word. Then the only smile that had come upon her lips for many months came there; a smile sadder than tears, more bitter than all scorn.

'He will outlive me, fear not,' she said, as she put out her hand to the child. 'Now leave me, my dear; I am occupied.'

Bela touched her hand with his lips, which, despite his will, quivered as he did so. He felt that he had failed, that he had disobeyed and hurt her, that he had been unable to show one tenth of all the feelings which choked him with their force and longing. He hung his head as he went sorrowfully away. 'She may not know! She may not know!' he thought, with terror.

He looked back at her timidly as he closed

the door. She had resumed her writing; the red sunset light fell on her black gown, on her stately head, on her profile, cut clear as on a cameo.

He dared not return.

The mother whom he had known in other years, on whose knee he had rested his head as she told him tales in the twilight hour, whose hand had caressed his curls, whose smile had rewarded his stammering Latin or his hardly achieved line of handwriting, who had stooped over him in his drowsy dreams, and made him think of angels, the mother who had said to Egon Vàsàrhely: 'This is my Bela: love him a little for my sake,' seemed as far from him as though she were lying in her tomb.

She, when the tapestry had fallen behind the slender figure of her little son, continued to write on. It was hard, dry matter that she wrote of; the condition of her miners amongst the silver ore of the north-east. She forced her mind to it, she compelled her will and her hand; that was all. These things depended on her; she would not neglect them, she strove to find in them that distraction which lighter natures seek in pleasure. But in vain she now endeavoured to compel her attention to the details

she was following and correcting; soon they became to her so confused that they were unintelligible; for once her intelligence refused to obey her will. The child's words haunted her. She laid down her pen, pushed aside the reports and the letter in which she was replying to them, and rising paced to and fro the long polished floor of the library.

It was here that he had first bowed before her on that night when Hohenszalras had sheltered him from the storm.

'We had a mass of thanksgiving!' she thought.

The child's words haunted her. Not to know even *that* when they had passed nine years together in the closest of all human ties! For the first time the misgiving came to her, had she been too harsh? No; it would have been impossible to have done less; many would have done far more in chastisement of the fraud upon their honour and good faith. Yet as she recalled their many hours of joy it seemed as if she had remembered these too little. Then again she scouted her own weakness. What had been all his life beside her save one elaborate lie?

The broad shafts of the blazing sunset slanted across the inlaid woods of the floor which she paced; the windows were open, the birds sang

in the rose boughs and ivy without. The summers would come thus, one after another, with their intolerable light, and the intolerable laughter of the unconscious children; and she would carry her burden through them, though the day was for ever dark for her.

Time had been when she had thought that she should die if he were lost to her; but she lived on and marvelled at herself. Her very soul seemed to have gone from her with the destruction of her love. Her body seemed to her but a mere shell, an inanimate pulseless thing. The only thing that seemed alive in her was shame.

She paced now up and down the long room while the sunset died and the grey evening dulled the painted panes of the casements. The boy's question had pierced through her frozen serenity. It was true that she had no knowledge where his father was; he might be dead, he might be killed by his own hand—she knew nothing. She had bidden him let her forget that he had ever lived beside her, and he had obeyed her. He might be in the world of men, careless and content, consoled by others, or he might be in his grave.

All she knew was that he never touched the revenues of Idrac.

She paused on the same spot where he had

stood before her first, with his fair beauty, his courtier's smile, his easy grace, the very prince of gentlemen; and her hands clenched the folds of her gown as she thought—'the first of actors! Nothing more.'

And she, Wanda von Szalras, had been the dupe of that inimitable mimicry and mockery!

The thought was like a rusted iron, eating deeper and deeper into her heart each day. When her consciousness, her memory, would have said otherwise, would have told her that in much he was loyal and sincere, though in one great thing he had been false, she would not trust herself to hearken to the suggestion. 'Let me see clearly, though I die of what I see!' she said in her soul. She would be blind no more. She hated herself that she had been ever blind.

She had been always his dupe, from the first sonorous phrases she had heard him utter in the French Chamber to the last sentence with which he had left her when he went from her to the presence of Olga Brancka. So she believed. Here she did him wrong; but how was she to tell that? To her it seemed but one long-sustained comedy, one brilliant and hateful imposture.

Sometimes his cry to her rang in her ears: 'Believe at least that I did love you!' and

some subtle true instinct in her whispered to her that he had there been sincere, that in passion and devotion at least he had never been false. But she thrust the thought away; it seemed but another form of self-deception.

The dull slow evening passed as usual; it was late in summer and the night came early. She dined in company with Mdme. Ottilie and sat with her as usual afterwards. The room seemed full of his voice, of his laughter, of the music of which he had had such mastery.

She never opened her lips to say to the Princess Ottilie: 'But for you he would have passed from my life a mere stranger, seen but once.' But the tender conscience of the Princess made her feel the bitterest reproach every time that the eyes of her niece met her own, every time that she passed the blank space in the picture gallery where once had hung the portrait of Sabran, painted in court dress by Mackart. The portrait was locked away in a dark closet that opened out from the oratory of his wife. With its emblazoned arms and marquis's coronet on the frame, it had seemed such a perpetual record of his sin that she had had it taken from the wall and shut in darkness, feeling that it could not hang in its falsehood amidst the portraits of her people. But often she opened the door of her oratory and

let the light stream upon the portrait where it leaned against the closet wall. It seemed then as if he stood living before her, looking as he had looked so often at the banquets and balls of the Hofburg, when she had felt so much pride in his personal beauty, his grace of bearing, his supreme distinction.

'Who could have dreamed that it was but a perfect comedy,' she thought, 'as much a comedy as Got's or Bressant's!'

Then her conscience smote her with a sense that she did him injustice when she thought so. In all things save his one crime he had been as true a gentleman as any of the great nobles of the empire. His intelligence, his bearing, his habits, his person, were all those of a patrician of the highest culture. The fraud of his name apart, there had been nothing in him that the most fastidious aristocrats would have disowned. He had inherited the qualities of a race of princes, though he had been descended unlawfully from them. His title had been a borrowed thing, unlawfully worn; but his supreme distinction of manner, his tact, his bodily grace, that large and temperate view of men and things which marks a gentleman, these had all been inborn and natural to him. He had been no mere actor when he had moved through a throne-room by her side. Her calmer reason

told her this, but her instincts of candour and of pride made her deny that where there was one fraud there could be any truth.

She span on now at her ivory wheel because it was mere mechanical work, which left thought free. The Princess, in lieu of slumbering, looked at her ever and again. Suddenly she gathered her courage and spoke.

'Wanda, you are a Christian woman,' she said slowly and softly. 'Is it Christian never to forgive?'

Her face did not change as she turned the spinning-wheel.

'What is forgiveness?' she said coldly. 'Is it abstinence from vengeance? I have abstained.'

'It is far more than that!'

'Then I do not reach it.'

'No; you do not. That is why I presumed to ask you, is it in consonance with your tenets, with your duties?'

'I think so.'

'Then change your creed,' said the Princess.

A sombre wrath shone in her eyes as she looked up one moment.

'I have the blood in me of men who were not always Christians, but who, even when Pagan, knew what honour was. There are some

things which are so vile that one must be vile oneself before one can forgive them.'

The Princess sighed.

'I am in ignorance of the nature of your wrongs; but this I know—they erred who gave you absolution at Eastertide, whilst you still bore bitterness in your soul.'

'Would I lay bare my soul and his shame now to any priest?' thought Wanda; but she repressed the answer. She said simply: 'Dear mother, believe me, I have been more merciful than many would have been.'

'You mean that you have not sought for a divorce? Nay, that is not mercy; that is decency, dignity, self-respect. When they of a great race go to the public with their wrongs they drag their escutcheon in the mud for the pleasure of the crowd. That you have not done; that is not mercy. You do but follow your instincts; you are a gentlewoman.'

A momentary impulse came over her, as she heard, to tell her companion his sin and her own shame; the woman's weakness, desiring sympathy and comprehension, assailed her for an instant. But she resisted and repressed it. The Princess Ottilie was aged and feeble. She had had no slight share in bringing about this union, which was now so cruelly broken; she had been ever proud of

her penetration and devoted to his defence. To learn the truth would be a shock so terrible to her that it must needs be veiled from her for ever. Besides, his wife felt as though the relation would blister her lips were she to make it even to her oldest friend.

Had she known all, the elder woman would have been even more bitter in her hatred, even more inflexible in her sense of outrage than she herself; but she could not purchase sympathy at such a price. She chose rather to be herself condemned.

Offended, the Princess rose slowly to go to her own apartments. The tears welled painfully in her eyes.

'You were so happy, he was so devoted,' she murmured. 'Can all that have crumbled like a house of sand?'

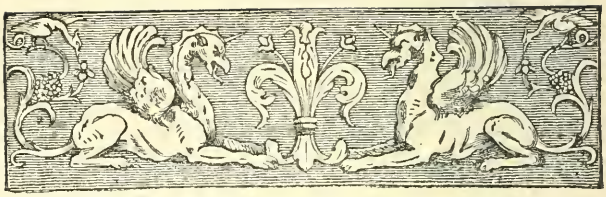
Wanda von Szalras said bitterly:

'What did I say once, the day of my betrothal? That I leaned on a reed. The reed has withered, that is all. You see, I can stand without it.'

She conducted her aunt to her bedchamber with the usual courteous observances; then returned and sat long alone in the silent chamber.

'Forgive! what is the obligation of for-

giveness?' she thought. 'It is the obligation to pardon offences, infidelity, unkindness, cruelty, but not dishonour. To forgive dishonour is to be dishonoured. So would my fathers have said.'



CHAPTER XL.

BELA that dawn was awakened by his mother standing beside his bed. She stooped and touched his curls with her lips.

'I was harsh to you yesterday, my child,' she said to him. 'I come to tell you now that you were quite right to have the thought you had. You are his son; you must not forget him.'

Bela lifted up his beautiful flushed face and his eye brilliant from sleep.

'I am glad I may remember,' he said simply; then he added, with his cheeks burning: 'When I am a man I will go and find him and bring him back.'

His mother turned away her face.

When his manhood should come and he should hear the story of his father's sin, what

would he say? Would not all his soul cry out aloud and curse the impostor who had begotten him?

The eyes of Bela followed the dark form of his mother as she passed from his room.

'She is very unhappy,' he thought wistfully. 'If I could find him *now*, would it make her happy again, I wonder?'

And the chivalry that was in his blood stirred in his childish veins.

'But you said that she sent him away?' whispered Gela, when Bela got upon his brother's bed and confided his thoughts to him.

'I did think so; but I might mistake,' said Bela. 'Perhaps he went because he was obliged, and that it is which grieves her.'

'Perhaps,' said Gela, meditatively.

'If I only knew where to go to find him I would go all over the world,' said Bela, with passion. 'I would ride Folko to the earth's very, very, end to reach him.'

'You could not get over the seas so,' said Gela; 'and he may be over the seas.'

'And we have never even seen the sea!' said Bela, to whom the suggested distance seemed more terrible than he had ever imagined. 'What can we do, Gela, do you think? you are clever about everything.'

Gela was silent a moment.

'Let us pray for him with all our might,' he said solemnly; and the two little boys knelt down by the bedside in their little night-shirts and prayed together for their father.

When Bela rose his face was very troubled, but very resolute. He drew out of its sheath a small sword with a handle of gold, which Egon Vàsàrhely had sent him years before. 'One must pray first,' he thought, 'but afterwards one must help oneself. God does not care for cowards.'

In the day he went out all alone and found Otto; the children were allowed to go over the home woods at their pleasure. The *jägermeister* was very dear to Bela, for he told such wondrous tales of sport and danger, and spoke with such reverent affection of his lost lord.

'Where *can* he be, Otto?' said the child now, in a low hushed voice, as they sat under the green oak boughs.

'Ah, my little Count, if only I knew!' said Otto. 'I would walk a thousand miles to him, and take him the first blackcock that shall fall to my gun this autumn.'

'You really say the truth? You do not know?' said Bela, with stern questioning eyes.

'Would I tell a lie, my little lord?' said the old hunter, reproachfully. 'Since your father

drove away that cruel night none of us have set eyes on him, or ever heard a word. If Her Excellency do not know, how should we?'

'I mean to find him,' said the child, solemnly.

The old man sighed.

'How should you do that? Our hills are between us and all the rest of the world. Perhaps he is gone because he was tired of being here.'

'No,' said Bela, who remembered his father's farewell to him, of which he could never bring himself to speak to any living creature.

Otto was silent too: he could not tell the child what all the household believed—that his father had found too great a charm in the presence of the Countess Brancka.

The weeks and months stole on their course, which in the forest-heart of the old Archduchy seems so leisurely beside the feverish haste of the mad world. The ways of life went on unchanged; the children throve, and studied, and played, and grew apace; the health of the Princess became more delicate, and her strength more feeble; the seasons succeeded each other with monotony; no sound from the cities of men that lay beyond the ramparts of the glaciers broke the silence and the calm of Hohenszalras.

Wanda herself would not have known that one year was different to another had she not been forced to count time by the inches which it added to the stature of her offspring, and the recurrence of the days of their patron saints. They grew as fast as reeds in peaceful waters, and forced her to recognise that the years were dropping into the past. Time for her was shod with lead, and crept tamely, like a cripple upon broken ground. For the children's sake she lived ; but for them she knew not why she rose to these long, colourless, lonely hours. But her corporeal life ailed nothing, whilst her spiritual life was sick unto death. Almost she could have wished for the lassitude of weakness to dull her pain ; her bodily strength seemed to intensify what she suffered.

In the frosted brilliant winter time she still drove her fiery horses over the snow that was like marble, plunging into the recesses of the woods, seeing above her the ramparts, and bastions, and pinnacles of the great ice-range of the Glöckner glaciers. The intense cold, the rushing air, the whiteness as of a virgin earth, the sense of profound solitude, did her good, cooled the sense of shame that seemed burnt into her life, soothed the anguish of a love fooled, betrayed, and widowed. She felt

with horror that the longer she kneeled beside the altar, the longer she prayed before the great Christ in her chapel, the more passionately she rebelled against the fate that had overtaken her. But, alone in the rarefied air, with the vastness of the mountains about her, with the cold wind pouring like spring water down a thirsty throat in its merciful coldness, with the white peaks meeting the starry skies, and the waters hushed in their shroud of ice, she gathered some kind of peace, some power of endurance: consolation neither earth nor heaven could give to her.

Of him she never heard. She could only have heard through her lawyers, and they knew nothing. Neither in Paris nor in Vienna was he seen. By a letter she received from the priest of Romaris she had learned that he was not there. She had sent one of her men of business thither with money and plans, to build on the site of the old house of the Sabrans a Maison de Dieu for the aged and sick fishermen of the coast and their widows. 'It will be a *chapelle expiatoire*,' she had thought bitterly, and she had endowed it richly, so that it should be independent of all those who should come after her. In all the occupations entailed by this and similar projects she was as attentive as of yore to all demands made on her.

When she perused a lawyer's long preamble, or corrected an architect's estimates and drawings, she was the same woman as she had been ere her betrayer had crossed the threshold of her home. Her character had been built on lines too strong, on a base too firm, for the earthquake of calamity, the whirlwind of passion, to undo it. But in her heart there was utter shipwreck. She had given herself and all that was hers with magnificent generosity; and she had received in return betrayal and a dishonour under which day and night all the patrician in her writhed and suffered.

When in the autumn of that year Cardinal Vàsàrhely, travelling in great state from Buda Pesth, arrived at Hohenszalras—a guest whom none could deny, a judge whom none could evade—he did not spare her open interrogation, searching censure, stern rebuke.

The Lilienhöhe she had excused herself from receiving; the Kaulnitz she had also refused; others as nearly related to her had encountered the same resistance to their overtures; but Cardinal Vàsàrhely came to take up his residence at the Holy Isle, with the weight of authority and the sanctity of the Church.

He visited his niece for the sole purpose of remonstrance. When he found himself met by a respectful but firm refusal to acquaint him

with the reasons for her conduct, he did not, either, spare her the stately wrath of the incensed ecclesiastic. He was a man of noble presence, and of austere if arrogant life. He spoke with all the weight of his sixty years and of his eminence in the service of the Church. His eyes were bent on her in stern scrutiny as he stood drawn up to all his great height beside her in the library.

'If your griefs against your husband,' he urged, 'are of sufficient gravity to justify you in desiring eternal separation from him, you should not lean merely upon your own strength. You should seek the support of your spiritual counsellors. Although the Holy Church has never sanctioned the concubinage which the laws of men have called by the name of divorce; yet, as you are aware, my daughter, in extreme cases the Holy Father has himself deigned to unloose an unworthy bond, to annul an unsuitable marriage. In your case, if the offences of your lord have been so grave, I make no doubt that by my intercession with His Sanctity it would be possible to dissolve an union which has become unholy.'

She met his gaze calmly and coldly.

'Your Eminence is very good to interest yourself in my sorrows,' she replied; 'but for the intercession with our Holy Father which

you offer, I will not trouble you. Whatever the offences of my husband be against me, they can concern me alone. I have summoned no one to hear them. I seek no one's judgment. As regards the power of the Supreme Pontiff to bind and loose, I would bow to it in all matters spiritual, but I cannot admit that even he can release me from an earthly tie which I voluntarily assumed.'

A rebuking wrath flashed from the eagle eyes of the great Churchman.

'I did not think that Wanda von Szalras would heretically deny the Pope his power over all souls!' he said sternly. 'Are you not aware that when the Holy Father deigns in his mercifulness to decree a marriage as null and void, it becomes so from that instant? It is as though it had never been; the union is effaced, the woman is decreed pure.'

'And the children,' she said bitterly; 'can the Holy Father efface *them*?'

The Cardinal was affronted and appalled.

'You would call in question the infallible omnipotence of the Head of the Church!' he said with horror.

'The days of miracles are past,' she said coldly. 'I shall not entreat for them to be wrought for me. I trust your Eminence will pardon me if I say that no human, nay, no

heavenly, permission could legitimate adultery in my sight or in my person.'

'You merit excommunication, my daughter,' said the haughty prelate, his brow black with wrath. He saw no reason why this marriage, which had offended all her house, should not be annulled by the all-powerful verdict of the Vatican. Such cases were rare, but it would be possible to include hers amongst them. The children could be consigned to religious houses, brought up to religious lives, unknown to and unknowing of the world.

'If the man whom you chose to wed,' he continued sternly, 'has offended or outraged you so greatly, let your relatives judge him and deal with him. You were warned against the gift of your hand to a stranger with an uncertain past behind him; he had not the eminence, the repute, the character that should have been demanded in your husband. But you were inflexible in your resolve then, as you are now in your silence.'

'I know of no one living to whom I owe any account,' she said with haughty decision; 'no one to whom I was bound to lay bare my mind and heart then, or to whom I am so bound now.'

'You are so bound every time you kneel in the confessional.'

'To reveal my own sins, perchance, not his.'

'Your soul should be as an open book before your priest.'

'Your Eminence will pardon me. I bow willingly and reverently to the Church in all matters spiritual, but in the rule of my own conduct I admit no guide but my conscience. My sorrows are all my own. No priest or layman shall intrude upon them.'

She spoke with peremptory and unyielding decision; the old spirit of her race was aroused in her, which in times bygone had bearded popes and monarchs, and braved the thunders of excommunication. They had been pious sons of Rome, but yet ofttimes rebellious ones; when their honour called one way and the priests pointed the other, they had lifted their swords in the sunlight and gone whither honour bade.

The Churchman knew that power of secular revolt which had been always latent in the Szalras blood; he knew now that, armed with the weapons of the Church though he was, he might as well seek to bow the mountains down as bend her will. He took for granted that her wrongs were great enough to entitle her to freedom; he had thought that she might wed again with his nephew, who had loved her so long; their mighty fortunes would have fitly

met; this hateful union with a foreigner, a sceptic, a debauchee, would have become a thing of the past, washed away into absolute non-existence;—so he had dreamed, and he found himself confronted with a woman's illogical inconsistency and obstinacy.

He was deeply incensed. He assailed her for many days with all the subtle arguments of the ecclesiastical armoury, but he made no impression. She utterly refused to tell why she had exiled her husband from her house, and she as utterly refused to take any measures to attain her own freedom. When he left her he said a word of rebuke that long lingered in her memory. 'You are rebellious and almost heretical, my daughter. You entrench yourself in your silence and your pride, which you appear to forget are heinous sins when opposed to your spiritual superiors. But this only I will remind you of: if you deny the Church the power to annul the union of which its sacrament sanctified the consummation, be at least consistent: do not absolve yourself from its duties.'

With that keen home thrust in parting he left her, giving his blessing to the kneeling household; and six white mules, always kept there in readiness for his visits, bore him away through the embrowning woods.

When he reached his palace in Buda he summoned Egon Vàsàrhely and related what had passed.

His nephew heard in silence.

'Your Eminence erred in your judgment of Wanda,' he said at length. 'She would never make her wrongs, whatever they be, public, nor seek for dissolution of her marriage. She may repent it, but she will repent it in solitude.'

'If the marriage be so sacred in her eyes,' said the angry prelate, 'let her continue to live with her husband. She has been a law to herself; she has parted from him; where is the wifely submission there? Where the sanctity of the immutable bond?'

'Perhaps some day she will bid him return,' said Vàsàrhely, whose features were very grave and pale.

'She could forget this fatal folly like a bad dream,' continued the Cardinal, unheeding. 'She could begin a new life; she could wed with you.'

'Your Eminence mistakes,' said Vàsàrhely, abruptly. 'Though that man were dead ten times over, Wanda would never wed with me—nor I with her.'

'You are both wiser than the wisdom and holier than the holiness of the Church,' said the incensed ecclesiastic, with boundless scorn.

He was accustomed to bend human volition like a willow wand in his hand.

When she herself had left the terrace where she had parted from the prelate, having accompanied him there in that stately etiquette which, though she had been dying, habit would have compelled her to observe in every detail, she had turned with a sense of intolerable pain from the sunshine of the September day.

It was a pretty scene that stretched before her, the children standing bareheaded, the household hushed and kneeling still where the mighty dignitary of the Mother Church had given them his benediction; the gold embroideries and rich colours of the liveries glowing in the light; the white mules and the scarlet-clothed attendants of the Cardinal passing down the avenue of oaks, with the immediate background of the darksome yews, and, further, the flushed foliage of the forests and the shine of the snow peaks; but to her it was fraught with unendurable associations. The central figure was missing from it which for so many years had graced all pageants and conducted all ceremonies there. It was the sole time since the exile of her husband that there had been any arrival or departure at Hohenszalras.

She had been compelled to receive the Car-

dinal with all due state and observance, and the oppressiveness of his three days' sojourn had worn and wearied her.

'I would sooner receive five emperors than one Churchman,' she said to the Princess. 'We are far from the days of the Apostles!'

'Christ must be honoured in His Vicars,' said the Princess, coldly, and with disapprobation chill on all her features.

Wanda turned away as the white mules disappeared in a bend of the avenue, and went into the house alone, whilst the children and the household still lingered in the sunshine. She traversed the whole length of the building to reach her octagon-room, where she was certain to be alone. The interrogation and censure of her uncle had left on her a harassed sense of being somewhere at fault: not to him, nor to the Church he represented and invoked, but to her own conscience.

As she passed through one of the galleries she saw her youngest child Egon, now nearly two years old, playing with his nurse, an old, grave North German woman. They were the only living beings of the house who had not been upon the terraces to receive the Cardinal's last blessing; the one too young, the other too old to care. The child, with his fair face and his light curls, was like the child Christ of Carlo

Dolce, yet there was the same resemblance in him to his father which pierced her soul whenever she looked in the faces of her other offspring.

She paused and stooped towards him now, where he played with a toy lamb in the breadth of sunlight that fell warm and broad through the open lattices of an oriel window, in the embrasure of which his attendant was sitting. The baby looked up under his long dark lashes, and made a little timid movement towards his nurse.

'Is he afraid of me?' said Wanda, with the same vague sense of remorse which she had felt before his eldest brother.

'Oh no! he is not afraid, my lady,' said the old woman with him, hurriedly. 'But he sees you so rarely now, and when they are so young they are frightened at grave faces.'

The nurse stopped herself, fearing she had said too much; but her mistress listened without anger and with a sharp pang of self-reproach.

'Come for him to my room when I ring,' she said; and she stooped again and lifted the little boy in her arms.

'Are you all afraid of me, my poor children,' she murmured to him. 'Surely I have never been cruel to you?'

He did not understand; he was still frightened, but he put his arm about her throat and hid his pretty face on her shoulder with a gesture that was half terror, half confidence. She took him to her own room and soothed and caressed and amused him, till he regained his natural fearlessness and sat happy on her knee, playing with some Indian ivory toys; then he grew tired, and leaned his head against her breast, and fell asleep as prettily as a Star of Bethlehem shuts its white leaves up at sunset.

She watched him with an aching heart.

She could look on none of her children without a throb of intolerable shame. They were the symbols as they were the offspring of all her hours of love. Another woman might have forgotten all except that they were hers.

She could not.

From that day she had the younger children brought to her more often, drove them out at times, and soon regained their affection, although to them all a majesty and melancholy, as inseparable from her now as shadows from the night, made her presence inspire them with a certain awe; even Lili, the most wilful of them all, in her pretty, gay, childish vanity and naughtiness, never ventured to disobey or to weary her.

'When I am with her it is as if I were at

Mass,' Lili said to her brothers. 'You know what one feels when the Host comes and the bell rings, and it is all so still, and only the Latin words——'

'It is the presence of God that we feel at Mass,' said Gela, in a hushed voice. 'And I think our mother has God with her very much. Only He makes her sad.'

'But she never does cry,' said her little daughter.

'No,' said Gela, 'I think she is too sad for that. You know when it is very, very cold the skies cannot rain. I think that it is just so cold with her.'

And Gela's own eyes filled, for he, the most thoughtful and the most quick in perception of them all, adored his mother. When he could he would sit in her presence for hours, mute and motionless, with a book on his knees, glancing at her with his meditative eyes now and then in rapt veneration.

'When Bela grows up he will wander, I dare say, and perhaps be a great soldier,' Gela thought at such times. 'But for me, I shall stay always with our mother, and read every thing that is written, and do all I can for the people, and care for nothing but for her and them.'

She had not let loose in the presence of

Cardinal Vàsàrhely the burning wrath which had consumed her. And yet the valedictory words of the prelate recurred to her with haunting persistency. He had said to her: 'If you refuse to be released from your marriage, do not absolve yourself from its duties.' Was it possible, she asked herself, that she still owed allegiance to one who, whilst he had embraced her, had dishonoured her?

'As well,' she thought bitterly, 'as well say that the man and woman chained and drowned together in the Noyades of Nantes were united in a holy union!'

'*Ego conjungo vos in matrimonium, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*'

As she remembered those words of the Marriage Sacrament, uttered as she had stood beside him in the midst of the incense, the colour, the pomp, the gorgeous grandeur of the Court Chapel in Vienna, she felt that they had bound on her eternal silence, perpetual constancy, even in a sense continual submission; they forbade her to disgrace him before the world; they made his shame hers, they required her to defend him so far as in her lay from the punishment with which the laws would have met his wrong-doing: but she could not bring herself to acknowledge that it demanded more. Truth could not be forced to dwell beside falsehood.

Honour could not take the kiss of peace from dishonour.

The natural veneration she bore to the speaker added to the weight of the reproach implied in the Cardinal's words. Even beyond her pride was her intense sense of the obligations of duty. She asked herself a thousand times a week if she had indeed failed in these. Honour was a yet higher thing than duty. Offended honour had its title to any choice. Her race had never gone to others with their wrongs; they had known how to avenge themselves by their own hand, in their own way. If she had chosen to stab him in the throat which had lied to her she would not, she thought, have gone outside her right. Yet she had been merciful to him; she had neither exposed nor chastised him; she had simply cut his life adrift from hers, which he had outraged.

No man's repute is hurt by separation from his wife; he was in no worse circumstance than he had been ere he had met her; she did not withdraw her gifts. She had given a noble name to one nameless; she had granted a feudal title to a bastard; she had enriched a man who previously had owned nothing, save half a million of francs won at play and a strip of sea-shore that was stolen. She withdrew none of her gifts; she left the impostor to the

full enjoyment of the world; she did not even move a step to secure the world's sympathy with herself. All she had done as her just vengeance was to withdraw herself from the pollution of his touch, and to exile him from the home of her fathers. Who could have done less? His children would in the future possess all she had, though through him they destroyed the purity of her race for ever: centuries would not wash out in her sight the stain that was in their blood: but she did not disinherit them. She could not see that she had failed anywhere in her duty; she had been more generous in her judgment than many could have been. Wherever women spoke of her and of her separation from her husband, there would they surely, with many a bitter word, repay her all the affronts which she had put upon them by her indifference and by what they had esteemed her arrogance. She knew that in such a position as she had perforce created, unexplained, the man is easily and constantly absolved of blame, the woman is always and certainly condemned. Therefore she had never doubted that the future would lie lightly on his shoulders, passed in sensual idleness, in oblivion more or less easily attained. Could it be possible that though she had been so cruelly betrayed her own obligations remained the same? Had her mar-

riage vows compelled her to endure even such offence as this without alteration in her own obedience? Was she inconsistent in sending her betrayer from her, whilst she still considered her bond to him binding? Since she refused to take advantage of the release that the Law and the Church would give her, was it unjustifiable to free herself from his hourly presence, his daily contact? No! she could not believe that it was so.

On her name-day, in the following spring, addressing his felicitations to her, Egon Vàsàrhely added words which had cost him much to write.

'You know how dear, more dear than any earthly thing, you have been ever to me,' he wrote, 'therefore you will pardon me what I am about to say. If I had followed my own selfish desires I should have entreated you to disgrace him publicly, begged you to shake off publicly all bonds to a traitor; and I should have shot him dead, with or without the formula of a quarrel; he himself knew that well. But for your own sake I would say to you now, pardon him if you can. Though you are the possessor of a position and of a character rare amongst women, yet even you must suffer as a separated wife. The children as they grow older will suffer from it likewise. You could

divorce your husband; the Law and the Church would set you free from an union contracted in ignorance with a man guilty of a fraud. You would be free, and he would endure his fit chastisement. But I understand why you refuse to do that. I comprehend your feeling. Publicity would to you intensify disgrace. Divorce could do nothing to heal your cruel wounds. Therefore I urge on you forgiveness. It has cost me many months' bitter struggle to be able to write this to you. His offence is vile. His past is hateful. He himself merits nothing. But for your commands I would have set my heel on his throat as on a snake's. But there may have been excuses even for him; and since you acknowledge him as your husband you will, in the end, be more at peace if you do not continue to insist on a separation which will be food for the world's calumny. Besides, though you know it not, you have not exiled him from your heart, though you have sent him from your house. If you had not still loved him you would have said to me—Slay him. I believe that he loved you, though he had such foul guilt against you, and he must have some true qualities of character and mind since he satisfied yours for many long years. Of where he may be now I know not. Since I saw you I have not quitted my own country. But I would

say to you—wherever he be, send for him. You will understand without words what it costs me to say to you—Since you will not accept the freedom of the Law, summon him to you and cleanse his soul in yours. I speak for you, not him. If I saw him lying dead like a dog in a ditch, for myself, I should thank God. Sometimes I look with stupor at my sword. Can it lie idle there and you be unavenged?'

The letter touched her profoundly. She realised the grandeur of generosity, the force of compelling duty, which had enabled Vàsàrhely to write it, proudest of gentlemen as he was, most devoted of lovers as he had been.

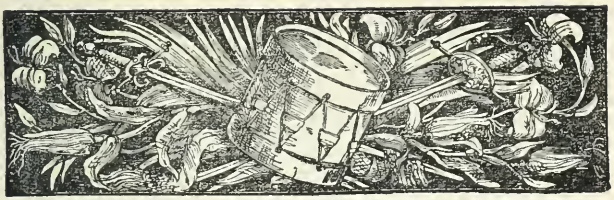
She replied to him:

'I have thought myself strong, but of late years I have found that there are things beyond my strength; what you counsel is one of them. Religion enjoins, indeed, forgiveness without limit; but there are wrongs for which religion makes no provision, and of which it has no comprehension. Nevertheless, I thank you for him and for myself.'

Any crime, any folly, any violence or faithlessness, which yet should have left his honour pure, she thought it would have been possible to condone; the life of a woman who loves must ever be one long pardon. But such shame as this of his ate into her very soul, as

rust into the pure metal. It was such shame that when her heart went out to what she had once loved in the yearning of affection, she felt herself disgraced, feeling that the dominion of the senses, the weakness of remembered and desired joys made her oblivious of indignity, feeble as an enamoured fool.

Her friends, her priests, even her own conscience might say to her 'Forgive,' but she could not bend her will to do it. Forgiveness would mean reconciliation, union, life spent together as in their days of love. She could not bring herself to endure that perpetual contact, that incessant communion. To her sight he was stained with a moral leprosy. She could not consent to admit that one in spiritual health, and clean of guilt, must dwell with one spiritually diseased.



CHAPTER XLI.

ANOTHER year passed by, and of him she still heard nothing. As, once before, his silence had told her of his passion more eloquently than speech could have done, so now the same silence tended to soften her wrath, to soothe her horror. She had expected him to take one of two courses: either to assail her with written entreaties for pardon, and ceaseless efforts to palliate his crime in her sight, or to go out into the world of men to seek oblivion in pleasure, and perhaps absolution in ambition.

He had done neither.

Once she, having occasion to go to the room which had been set aside for the boys' studies, saw the old professor absorbed in the perusal of a letter. Confused and startled he

slipped it hurriedly beneath a Latin exercise of Bela's, which lay with other papers on the table. The children were out riding.

His mistress looked at him, and her face grew a shade paler still.

'You correspond with my husband?' she said abruptly, pausing, as she always paused, before she said the latter words.

Greswold flushed consciously, stammered a few unintelligible words, and was silent.

'You hear from him?' she continued with correct inference. 'You know where he is?'

'I have promised that I will not say. I pray your Excellency to pardon me,' murmured the old man, the colour mounting upward to his grey locks.

She was silent a moment; she knew not what emotion moved her, whether wrath, or wonder, or offence; or whether even relief from long suspense.

'Do not be angered, my lady,' pleaded Greswold, timidly. 'It is the only way in which he can hear of you and of his children. Could your Excellency believe that all these months, these years, he lived on without any tidings?'

'I think you have exceeded your duty,' she said coldly. 'I think that you should have asked my permission.'

The old man stood penitent, like a chidden

child. He was afraid of her interrogations; but she made none.

'You will give me your word,' she pursued, 'never to speak of this correspondence to Herr Bela or to any of the children.'

Greswold bowed his assent. 'My lord has forbidden me also,' he said eagerly.

Her brows contracted.

'You have committed an imprudence,' she said, in a tone which chilled the old man to the marrow. 'Be heedful that no one knows of it.'

She said no more; took the volume she had needed, and quitted the room.

'Who shall tell the heart of a woman?' thought Greswold, left to himself. 'She knows not whether the man she once adored be living or dead, and she does not put to me one single question, does not even seek to learn where he dwells or what he does! What could his sin be to sweep all love away as fire makes a desert of a smiling meadow? And be it what it would, of what use is human love if it have not enough of the divine love in it to rejoice over the sinner who repents?'

He knew not that the sin she might, she would, have forgiven, but that the shame ate into the fair marble of her honour like a corroding acid.

From that time he expected daily some fresh question, some allusion at least to the confession which she had surprised from him. But she never spoke to him again of it. If she placed a violent control upon herself, because she did not think it fitting to speak of her husband to one in her employ, or if her husband were absolutely dead to her memory and her affections, he could not tell. He only knew that by no word or sign did she appear to recall the brief conversation which had passed between them.

Although what he had done was innocent enough, the old physician, in his scrupulous sense of duty, began to have a sense of guilt. Had he any right to retain any hidden knowledge from the mistress whose roof sheltered him, and whose bread he ate?

But his loyalty to his pledged word, and to him whom the world of men still called Sabran, obliged him to be mute.

'After all,' he thought, 'if she knew it might be better, but my first duty is to keep my word.'

She never tempted him to break it. She was not callous and hardened as he supposed. She felt a growing desire to learn where and how her husband had taken up the broken threads of his severed life. She had believed either

that he would return to the unfettered existence that could be dreamed away under the cedar groves of Mexico, with the senses satisfied and the moral law set at naught, or that he would go amongst the men and women of the great world, popular, pitied, and easily consoled. She had seen that world exercise a potent fascination over him, and if it were called to pronounce against her or against him, she was well aware that he would bear away all its suffrages. He had always humoured and flattered it; she never.

He had passed from the sight of those who knew him as utterly as though he had descended to his grave. No sound or hint told her of his destiny. She still thought at times that he must have sought those flowery recesses of the West which had given his youth their shelter. It might well be that in his total ruin his instincts had urged him to return to the free barbaric life of his early manhood, where none would reproach him, none deride him, none know his secret or his sin. His correspondence with Greswold suggested a doubt to her. Perhaps remorse was with him and the weight of remembrance.

When, too harshly, she had assumed that all his love and life had been a lie, because one lie had been beneath it, she had told herself

that he would find solace in those vices and pastimes which, in his earlier years, had been fatal to his ambition and to his perseverance. But since he cared to hear of his children's welfare, it might well be that their life together was nearer to his heart than she had credited. She believed that, if he had been sunk in the kind of self-indulgence she had imagined, he would have shunned all tidings, all memories, of his lost home.

Then again, with the inconsistency of all great suffering, an intense indignation possessed her that he did dare to remember, did dare to recall, that her offspring were also his. Even alone the hot flush of an ever-increasing shame came to her face when she thought that she had been for nine long years his, in the most absolute possession that woman can grant to man. Exile, severance, silence, cold and dark as the winters of the land of his birth, could not alter that. Whenever he chose to think of her she must be his in remembrance still.

Once the Princess ventured to say again to her a word which came from her heart. They were standing on the terrace watching the blush of evening glow on the virginal snows of the mountains.

'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,' she murmured. 'Wanda, mine, do

never you think of those words—you who let so many suns rise and set, and find your wrath unchanged?'

'If it were *only* that!' she answered bitterly. 'It is so much else—so much else! Crimes deep as yonder water, high as yonder hills, I could have forgiven, but—a baseness—never! Nay, there are pardons that would only be as base as what they pardoned.'

So it seemed to her.

When again and again her heart was thrilled with its old tenderness, her mind was haunted by a million memories of dead delights, she strove against herself, and trod down her temptation with the merciless self-punishment of an ascetic. It humbled and stained her in her own sight to feel that love could live within her without honour.

'Forgive me,' said the Princess, 'but it always seems to me that you—noble and generous and pure of mind as you are—yet have met ill the supreme trial, the supreme test of your life. You believed that you loved the man you wedded, but you loved your own pride more. If love be not endless forbearance, endless compassion, endless pity and sympathy, what is it but the mere fever and instincts of carnal passions? What raises it above the self-indulgence of the senses if not its sacrifice of

will and its long-suffering? You have said so yourself in other days than these.'

'And what,' she thought passionately as she heard, 'what would it be but the basest indulgence of the senses to let oneself love and be beloved by what one scorned?—to stoop and kiss the lips that lied for mere sake of their sweetness?—to gather in one's arms the coward, the traitor, and persuade oneself that one forgave because one grew blind with amorous remembrance?'

'Is it well,' pursued her companion with soft solemnity, 'to let anyone who is so near to you live his own life when that life may be one of sin? You send him from you, and how can you tell into what extremes of evil or of folly despair may not drive him? A man cast forth from his home is like a ship cut loose from its anchor and rudderless. Whatever may have been his weakness, his offences, they cannot absolve you from your duty to watch over your husband's soul, to be his first and most faithful friend, to stand between him and his temptations and perils. That is the nobler side of marriage. When the light of love is faded, and its joys are over, its duties and its mercies remain. Because one of the twain has failed in these the other is not acquitted of obligation. Pardon me if I seem to censure.

Look in your own heart and judge if I err.'

'You do not know! You do not know! If I forgave him I should never forgive myself!'

She turned her head from the roseate and happy light that spoke to her of other days, and went with a swift uneven step into the house, now darkened by the passing of the day.

She flung his memory from her as so much unholiness. Had passion not yet lived in her, the coldness of unforgiving sorrow might not have seemed to her so sovereign a duty.

Some weeks after she had seen the letter in Greswold's hands a small hamlet was burnt down during a high north wind. It belonged to her. Hearing of the calamity she went thither at once. It was some two and a half German miles from the castle. She drove, herself, four young Hungarian horses, whose fretting graces and tempestuous gallop gave her the only pleasure which she was now capable of enjoying. They were harnessed to a carriage light and strong, built on purpose to scour rapidly rough forest roads and steep hill-sides. When she had visited the melancholy scene, given what consolation she could, and distributed money to the homeless peasants, pro-

mising to rebuild the houses with her own timber and shingles—for the conflagration had been the fault of no one, but of the wild wind which had scattered the burning embers of a hearth-fire on a neighbouring wood-stack—her horses were rested, and she began her homeward drive as the pale afternoon grew grey and the twilight fell on the little grassy vale, now charred and smoking with the smouldering ruins of the châlets.

'Our Countess never leaves us alone in any trouble,' said the women gathered about the stone statue of S. Florian, their most trusted patron, who, despite their prayers, had refused to save them from the flames. The hamlet was not far from the Maurer glaciers, and was shut in by a complete wall of mountains; it was green, fresh, beautifully cool in summer. Now, in the late spring, it was still dreary, and patches of snow still lay on its sward; it was set high on the mountain side, and dense forests sloped down from it, seldom traversed, and dark early in the afternoon. Her groom lit the lamps of her carriage as she entered the deep woods, through which the road was little more than a timber-track. The long gallops and the steep inclines coming thither had calmed and pacified her young horses. They gave her no trouble to control them, as they trotted rapidly along

the shadowy forest ways. In other parts of the country the sun had not then set, but here the gloom was grey, like that of a cloudy dawn. Yet it was not so dark but that she perceived ahead of her, as her horses turned a curve in the moss-grown path, a figure, whose height and outline made her heart stand still. As the animals went past him in their swinging trot the blaze of the lamps fell full upon him. He turned and retreated quickly into the undergrowth beneath the drooping boughs of the Siberian pines, but she saw him, he saw her. Mechanically he uncovered his head and bowed low; she drove onward with a sense of suffocation at her throat and a chill like ice in her veins. She had recognised him in that moment of time. He was changed, aged, and there were threads of grey in his hair. He wore a forester's dress and had a gun on his shoulder.

Where they had met, in these woods that lay under the snow saddle of the Reggen Thörl, it was still twenty English miles away from the burg. It was late when she reached home, but her people were used to those long night drives, and even the Princess had become resigned to them. On the plea of fatigue she went to her own rooms and there remained. A faintness and sense of confusion stayed with her. She had not thought that merely meeting

him thus would affect her. She had underrated the power of the past.

When she had deemed him far away in other countries he was there in her own lands, not twenty miles from her. The knowledge of his vicinity moved her with a mingled sense of unendurable pain, partial anger, reviving love. It seemed horrible to have passed him by as any stranger would have passed, without a sign or word. Yet he was dead to her, whether oceans were between them or only a few leagues of hill and grass and forest.

She did not sleep, she did not even lie down that night. He seemed always before her; in the stillness of her chamber she heard his voice, and she started up thinking he touched her.

He had looked aged, ill, weary, unhappy; the sight of him bore conviction to her that he, like herself, found no compensation, no consolation. Perchance her monitress had been right; she had been cruel. Perchance, whatever sin his present or his future life might hold would lie, directly indeed at his own door, but indirectly at hers. She had always held that high and spiritual view of marriage which, rising above mere sensual indulgence, regarded the bond of souls as sacred, and made the life on earth mere passage and preparation for eternity. She had loved to believe that she

ennobled, purified, exalted his life by union with hers. Was she now false to her own creed when she left him alone, unfriended, unpardoned, to drift to any solace in vice, or any distraction in evil, which might be his fate? The sensitiveness and apprehension of her conscience before the possibility of a neglected duty made of her meditations a very martyrdom. All her life long she had been resolute and serene in action, deciding quickly, and carrying resolve into action without hesitation; but here, in the supreme crisis of her fate, she was irresolute and wrung by continual doubt. Had it only been any other crime than this!—this which cankered all the honour of her race, and was rank with the abhorred putridity of fraud!

The spring passed into summer, and the children played amidst masses of roses and sweet ranks of lilies, stretching down the green grass alleys of the gardens. More than once she went to the same hamlet, where now châlets were arising, made of pine and elm, cut in the past winter in her own woods. But of him she saw no more. She could not bend her will to ask of him of any of her household, not even of Greswold. Whether he lingered amidst her mountains, or whether he had but come thither in a momentary impulse, she knew not.

The infinite yearning of affection, which is wholly outside the instincts of the passions, awoke in her once more. She began to doubt her own reading of obligation and of duty. Had her counsellors been right—had she met the supreme test of her character and had failed before it?

Was it true that a great love must be as exhaustless as the ocean in its mercy and as profound in its comprehension?

Had his sin to her released her from her duties towards him? Because he had been disloyal was she absolved from loyalty to him? Ought she sooner to have said to him,—'Nay, no crime, no untruth, no failure in yourself shall divide you from me; the darker be your soul the greater need hath it to lean on mine?'

In the violent scorn of her revolted pride, of her indignant honour, had she forgotten a lowlier yet harder duty left undone?

In her contempt and dread of yielding to mere amorous weakness had she stifled and denied the cry of pity, the cry of conscience?

> To suffer woes which hope thinks infinite,
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night,
> To defy power which seems omnipotent,
> To love, and live to hope till hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates,
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent.

This, perchance, had been the higher

diviner way which she had missed—this the obligation from the passion of the past which she had left unfulfilled, unaccepted.

Resolutely she had gone on upon her joyless path, not doubting that her course was right. It had seemed to her that there was no other way possible; that, stretching her hand to him across the gulf of shame that severed them, she would do nothing to raise him, but only fall herself, degraded to his likeness.

So it had always seemed to her.

Now alone the misgiving arose in her whether she had mistaken arrogance for duty; whether, cleaving so closely to the traditions of honour, she had forgotten the obligations of mercy. Had it been any other thing, any other sin, she thought, rather than this, which struck at the very root of all the trusts, of all the faiths, which she had most venerated as the legacy of her fathers! ——

Sometimes it seemed to her as though, were that time of torture to be lived through again, she would not send him from her; she would say to him:

'What we love once we love for ever. Shall there be joy in heaven over those who repent, yet no forgiveness for them upon earth?'

Sometimes it seemed to her as though even now, after these years, she still ought to summon him and say this. But time passed on and passed away, and it remained unsaid.

She rode often through the same woods, now in full leaf, with sunny waters tumbling and sparkling through their flower-filled moss, but he crossed her path no more. He might have come thither, she thought, in some brief hope of possible reconciliation to her, and then his courage might have failed him, and he might have returned to whatsoever distant climate held him, whatsoever manner of life consoled him. That he might dwell amidst the hills, unseen of men, for her sake, never once seemed to her possible. Egon Vàsàrhely might have done that ; but not he—he loved the world.

The summer weighed wearily upon her. The light, the fragrance, the gaiety of nature hurt her. In winter all the earth seemed of accord with herself ; it was silent, stern, solitary. The keen winds, the glittering snow, the air that was like a bath of ice, the sense of absolute isolation and seclusion which the winter brought with it were precious to her. Not even the pretty figures of the children running through the bowers of blossom and of foliage could make the summer otherwise than oppressive and mournful to her.

Sometimes she thought of how it had been on other summer nights, when he had wandered with her through the white lines of the lilies by the starlight, or sent the melodies of Schumann and of Beethoven out upon the dewy, balmy air. Then she could bear no more to look upon the moonlit gardens.

The love she had borne him stirred at those times beneath the gravestones of scorn and wrath and almost hatred which she had heaped upon it, to keep it buried far down for evermore. All the echoes of passion came to her at those moments; she despised herself because she felt that she would give her soul to feel his lips on hers again. She was ashamed that the mere sight of him could thus have moved her. Again and again she recalled noble acts, beautiful thoughts, which had been his; again and again she recalled the early hours of their love with burning cheeks and longing heart. She could have scourged herself to banish those memories, those desires. They were terrible and irresistible to her as the visions that assailed the saints of the Thebaïd. Her whole soul softened to him, yearned for him, forgave him. Then she would shrink in disdain from her own weakness, and pace her chamber like a wounded lioness.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE first flush of autumn came upon the woods. Soon it would be three years since Olga Brancka had driven thither, and her work had held good and never been undone. Bela and Gela had grown tall and slender as the young fir trees; and Bela often said to his brother: 'I was ten years old on Easter Day. That is quite old. If ever I am to find him I am old enough now.'

He had not forgotten. He never forgot. Every day he wearied his little brain with thinking what he could do. Every night he asked Heaven to help him. He had read a Bohemian ballad which had fascinated him; the story of how, in the days of chivalry, Wratislaw, the son of Berka, when but twelve years

old, had made, all by himself and on foot, a pilgrimage from Prague to Tartary, to release his brother from captivity. Bela knew very well that the world had changed since then, and that if some things were easier some were harder now than then. But if Wratislaw had done so much at twelve, why should he, who was ten, not do something?

He thought himself quite old. He had a big pony, and Folko was ridden by his little brothers. He had been taught to shoot at a target and a running mark; he had become skilful at climbing with crampons and managing a boat. When he rode he had long boots that pulled up to his knees. He could drive three ponies, harnessed in the Russian way, with skill and surety. Perhaps, he thought, the Bohemian boy had not been able to do half as much as this. The ballad spoke of him as a little weakling, and yet he had found his way from Prague, in her dusky plains, to burning Tartary.

Almost he was ready to set forth on a Quixotic search without any clue to where his father dwelt, but his educated sense checked him with the remembrance that, wide as the world was, it would be of no avail to begin a harebrained pilgrimage with no fixed goal. Even Wratislaw, who was his ideal, had been

certain that his brother languished in the Tartar tents before he had set his fair face to the south-east. So he remained patient in his impatience, and strove with all his might to perfect himself in all bodily exercises and manly habits, that he might be the better fitted to go on his errand whenever he should have any thread of guidance. No one guessed the resolves and the hopes which fermented like new wine in his pretty golden-haired head. His attendants thought each year that he grew gentler and more serious, and his tutors found him at once more docile and more absent-minded. But no one imagined that he was bent on any unusual enterprise

His father had not been recognised by the groom who had accompanied his mistress in the drive through the woods of the Reggen Thörl ; and no rumour of the near presence of Sabran had reached any of the household. Greswold alone knew that amidst the solitudes of the avalanche and the glacier, in the chill of the air where the eagle and the vulture alone made their home, in a life of absolute isolation, asceticism, and physical denial of every kind, the man who had sinned against her spent his exile, in such self-chosen expiation as was possible to one who had neither the faith nor the humility needful to make him

seek refuge and atonement in any religious service. He dwelt in the loneliness of the ice-slopes, leading the life of a common hunter, shunning all men, accepting each monotonous and joyless day as portion of his just punishment; in the perils of winter on the mountains doing what he could to save human or animal life; knowing no solace save such as existed for him in the sense of being near all that he had lost, and the power of watching the distant movements of his wife and children at such rare hours as he ventured to approach the hills of Hohenszalras and turn his telescope on the gardens of his lost home. A hunter or two, a guide or two of the Umbal and the Trojerthal had his confidence, but the loyalty which is the common virtue of all mountaineers made them preserve it faithfully. For the rest, in these unfrequented places, avoidance of all those who might have recognised him was easy; he was clothed like the men of the hills, and lived like them in a châlet, high perched on a ledge of rock at a great altitude in the wild and almost inaccessible region of the Hintere Umbalthörl. Of the future he never dared to think; he took each day as it came; the best he hoped for was a mountaineer's death some hour or another, amidst the clear serene blue ice, the everlasting snows.

When he had gone out from the chamber of his wife, banished and accursed, all his spirit had died in him, and nothing had seemed clear in his memory except that love which had been so insufficient to wash out his sin. The world would no doubt have welcomed him; he was not too old for its distractions and its ambitions to be still possible for him; but he had no courage left to take them up, no energy to make another future for himself. His whole life was consumed in a vain regret, as vain a desire, as vain a penitence. Had he had the faith of those men who dwelt under the willows of the Holy Isle he would have joined them. But he had no belief; he had only a futile, heart-broken, hopeless repentance, which availed him nothing and could atone for nothing.

Perhaps, he thought, if she had known that, it might have changed her. But he did not dare to approach her by any written appeal. It seemed to him as if any words from him would only appear but added falsehood, added insult. He never, even in his own thoughts, reproached her for her separation from him. He recognised that no other path was open to her. The pure daylight of her nature could find no mate in the dusk and shadow of his own; the loyalty of truth could

not unite with the servitude and cowardice of falsehood. He knew it, and never rebelled against his chastisement.

Whilst still it was dawn one morning, his young son, just awaking, heard a pebble thrown at his window. He sprang out of bed, and ran and looked out. Old Otto stood below.

'My little lord,' he said softly; 'if you can come to me in the woods, when you are dressed, I have something to tell you.'

'Of him?' cried Bela.

The huntsman made a sign of assent.

The child, excited to intense emotion, hardly knew how his servant dressed him, or how he swallowed his breakfast. After their morning meal he could always run in the woods, as he chose, before beginning his studies, and he sped as fast as his feet could bear him to the trysting-place.

'My lord, your father has been seen on the other side of Glöckner by my underling, Fritz,' said Otto, gravely; 'and I have heard, too, that the villagers have seen him in Pregratten. I made bold to tell you, Count Bela, for I had given you my word.'

Bela's whole form shook with excitement.

'I knew if he had died I should have known it!' he said, with a hushed ecstasy. 'Tell me more, tell me more, quick!'

'There is no more to tell, my little lord,' said Otto. 'Fritz will swear that he saw your father, though there was a stretch of glaciers and many fathoms of ice between them. He says there was no mistaking the way he sighted his rifle and fired. And I have heard by gossip, too, from the folks of the Hintere Umbalthörl that there can be no manner of doubt of the fact that His Excellency has dwelt there, for a time at least.'

Bela gave a deep breath.

'Then he lives, and I can find him!'

'Yes, he lives; the Lord be praised!' said Otto.

When he went to the house the boy told no one his precious secret. He studied ill, and was punished, but he did not heed it. His heart was full of joy; his brain teemed with projects.

'I will go and bring him back!' he kept saying to himself; and no force could hold his thoughts to his Homer or his Euclid.

He would tell no one, he resolved, not even Gela; and he would go alone, all alone, as the Bohemian boy had gone

'What ails Bela to-day? He is not like himself,' said his mother to Greswold, who assured her he was well, but added that he was often careless.

The child shut his secret up in his own breast, and though he longed to tell Gela he did not. He had been tempted to confide in Otto, but resisted even that desire, knowing that Otto was stern where duty pointed, and had been always forbidden to let the little nobles wander alone to the mountains. He had his father's power of reticence, his mother's strength of self-control.

He knew what hill work was like. The elder boys often went climbing, with their guides, on fine days from May to September, and had a little tent which was set up for them at a fair altitude, whence Greswold taught them to take observations and measurements. But the mountaineering for the season was now over; it was now S. Michael's Day, and avalanches fell and snow-storms had begun on the higher slopes. He knew that if anyone saw him he would be stopped and taken back. For that reason he said nothing to Gela, who could never be persuaded to a disobedience; and he rose in the dark, before the hour at which his attendant came to dress him, got his clothes on as best he could, slipped the sword Vàsàrhely had given him in his belt, and took his crampons and alpenstock in his hand.

He had kneeled and said his prayers, fervently though quickly.

'A soldier cannot pray *very* long if he hear the trumpets sounding,' he had thought, as he rose. He felt neither irresolution nor fear; he was strong with ardour and an exalted sense of right-doing.

He had the little knapsack which, in the long forest walks with his tutor, he was used to carry packed with simple food for a morning meal when they halted under the pines. He had put some bread and cakes into this overnight, and he had filled his little silver flask with milk, as he had seen the flasks of the gentlemen filled with wine in those grand days when the Kaiser and the Court had hunted with his father. Thus equipped he managed to escape from the house by a side door, left open by some of the under-servants, who had just risen. He knew the quick way to reach the Glöckner slopes, for he had been taken there by Otto to learn mountaineering, and for his age he climbed well. His eye was sure, his step firm, and he knew not fear. He never thought of the misery his absence might cause; he was absorbed in his self-imposed mission.

'I will bring him back,' he thought, 'and then she will smile again.'

He had been trained in the lore of the high hills too well not to know that it would take him several days to reach the Hintere Umbalthörl;

but he said to himself that this must be as it would. He would climb on and on, sleep in any hut he could, and find what food he might. The Bohemian boy had crossed many mountains and seas and deserts before he had ransomed his brother.

It was a fine morning, with light pleasant winds. There was a clear blue in the sky, though north-east there was a brown haze, such as hunters fear, upon the hills.

'It will rain or snow to-morrow,' thought Bela, who had been made wise in the signs of the weather. But even that prevision did not deter him; he had his liberty and he meant to use it. He had been well trained to all bodily exercises, and he could walk long and fast without fatigue. His slender fair limbs were as strong as steel, and his health was perfect. He knew all the tracks of the home-lying woods, and he wanted no one to guide him. He got, with promptitude and address, out of sight of the terraces and towers of Hohenszalras, and soon entered what was called the Schwarzenwald, a dense pine-wood ascending abruptly the mountain side from the gardens; the only place where the wildness of the hills came in unbroken contact and close proximity to the lawns and flowers of the south side of the schloss, the lower spurs

of the Gross Glöckner descending there so steep and stern that they enclosed the parterres with a gigantic rampart of granite.

The contrast of the rose gardens with these huge overhanging heights had always so pleased the tastes of the Szalras châtelaines, that they had never allowed any attempts to be made to change or modify the savage grandeur and sombre wilds of the black wood.

He was already a trained pedestrian, and he covered five miles without pausing to breathe himself. Then he thought he had come far enough to make it safe to pause and eat. He drank his milk and opened his knapsack. There was turf still about him, and a few trees, but he had come into the rocky region. Huge walls of red and grey marbles leaned over him ; white limestone crags faced him. Precipices, black with pines and firs, shelved downward. He was still on his mother's land, but in a part unknown to him.

Once rested, he climbed up manfully, straining his little velvet breeches and soaking his silver-buckled shoes in the wet moss as he went, for in the Schwarzenwald regular paths soon ceased. There was the barest track visible, made by sheep, and pushing its upward way under branches, over boulders, and through wimpling burns. It was the loneliest part of

all the woods and hills; descending as it did to the rose gardens of the burg, the hunters and shepherds seldom passed through it. Steep and solitary, crowned with bare rocks, and leading only to the glacier slopes, few steps ever went over its short grass save those of woodland animals and of shepherds' flocks. At this time of the year even the latter were not near. They had been already brought down to their stables from the green stretches of pasture between the rocks. Bela met no one; not even one of his own peasantry.

He climbed and climbed uninterrupted, at first enjoying his solitude rapturously, his triumph boisterously, and then going on more solemnly, being a little awed by the sense of utter silence round him, in which no sound was heard except of rippling water, of blowing boughs, and afar off some faint tinkle of a church bell from a distant hamlet.

His spirits were exalted and full of enthusiasm. Joined to his boldness and ardour he had the German love of the mystical and marvellous. All the vast white range of the Glöckner to him was as a fairyland, opening on enchanted empires all his own. All the forenoon he was happy.

His brain was busy with many pictures as he went. He saw his search successful and his

father found; he saw his happy return, and the crowd of the glad household which would flock to meet his steps; he thought how he would kneel down at her feet, and never rise until his prayer should be heard, and his mother smile again; he thought how he would cry out to her, 'Oh, mother, mother! I have brought him home!' and how she would look, and the light and the warmth come back into her face. It was so little to do—only to climb amidst these kindly familiar mountains that had been always above him and around him since first his eyes had opened. Wratislaw had gone over lands, and seas, and deserts, and braved the jaws of lions, and the steel of foemen, and the dragon's breath of the hot sand wind; he himself had so little to do; only to climb some rough uneven ground, some green steep pastures, some smooth fields of ice. He felt sad to think it was such a little thing.

Far down below he could hear the great bells of the burg chiming and clanging, and he knew that they were giving the alarm for him; he saw men small as mice grouping together here, and running apart there; he knew they were coming out to search for him. He resolved to be very wary. He had got so long a start that he was high on the hills ere he heard the alarm-bells ring. He knew that he

must avoid being seen by anyone he met, or, known as he was to the whole country-side, his liberty would soon be at an end. But the huts of the cattle-keepers were empty, and the chances of meeting a mountaineer were few. Hundreds of men might come upward in search of him, and yet miss him amidst those endless walls of stone, those innumerable peaks and paths and precipices, each one the fellow of the other.

He climbed the grassy slopes, the steep stone ways, as he had learned to do with Otto, and though he was still far from the sides of Glöckner he was yet soon on very high ground. A great mountain, green at the base, snow-covered half the way down, frowned above him; it was but one of the spurs of the Glöcknerwand, but he believed it to be the king of the Austrian Alps itself. He met no one; the mountains were solitary; the first breath of autumn had scared the cattle-keepers downward with their flocks and herds. Sometimes, very far off, he saw a lonely figure, a pedlar, or a hunter, or a shepherd, or some *alm* still tenanted by its flock, but they were mere specks on the immensity of the glacier slopes and the domes of snow. The solitude enchanted him at first; he had never been alone before. He drank from a stream, ate more bread, and held on firmly and fearlessly. The thought that his father

was there beyond him, amidst those dazzling peaks, those lowering clouds, seemed to shoe his little feet with fire. He felt weaker, for his bread had nourished him but little, and he had not found a hut of any kind as he had expected to do. But he toiled on, the slope of the same mountain always facing him, always seeming to recede and to grow higher and higher the further and further he went.

The wall of granite which he was on, nine miles or more above and beyond his home, was known as the Adler Spitze. He had been near it in other days, but he did not recognise it now; all these stern slopes and steeps, all these domes and roof-like ridges of snow and ice, so resemble each other that a longer apprenticeship to the hills than his had been is needed to distinguish them one from another. The Adler Spitze was a dangerous and seldom traversed peak; its sides were bristling with jagged rocks, and its chasms were many and deep. More than one death had been caused by it in late years, and near its summit his mother had caused to be erected a refuge, one of the highest of the district, where a keeper was for ever on the watch for belated travellers. These were, however, very few, for the mountain had gained a bad name amongst the hunters and pedlars and muleteers who alone

traversed these hills, and was left almost entirely to the birds of prey, which were numerous there and had given it its name.

When the pine-woods ceased, and there was only around him mere naked rock, with a little moss growing on it here and there, Bela knew that he had come very high indeed. And he had his wish: he was quite alone. There was nothing to be seen here except the dusky forest, shelving downward, and vast slopes of naked grey stone, with large loose rocks scattered over them, as if giants had been playing there at pitch-and-toss. There was too much mist in the north and west, which faced him, for the opposite mountains to be seen, for it was still early in the day. He did not now feel the joy and excitement he had expected. He had climbed to the glacier region indeed, but the scene around was dreary, and the vast expanse of vapour surrounding him looked chill and melancholy.

In the excitement and exultation of his thoughts he had forgotten many things which he knew very well, trained to the hills as he was; he had forgotten that it might rain or snow before he reached any halting-place, that fogs came on at that season with fatal suddenness, that if the sun were obscured the cold would soon become great, that if a mist came

down he would be unable to find any road, and that men had been often killed on those heights who had known every inch of the hills.

Something of his buoyancy and certainty of success began to pale and grow dull as the isolation lost its sense of novelty, and that intense silence of the glacier world, which is at all times so solemn, began to strike awe into his intrepid soul. He had often been as high, but there had been always on his ear his brother's voice, and his guide's laugh, and the merry sounds of the men chattering together as they climbed. Now there was no sound anywhere, save now and then a splitting cracking noise, which he knew was ice giving way under the noon-day heat of the sun. 'It must be just as still as this in the grave,' he thought, with a chill in his warm eager leaping young blood. A little tuft of edelweiss growing in a crevice, and an *alpenlerche* winging its way through the blue air, seemed to him like friends.

He wished now that Gela were with him.

'But it would have been of no use to ask him,' he thought sadly. 'He never will disobey, even to make good come of it.'

A white mist had settled over all the lower world, one of the autumn fogs which come from the lower clouds enwrapped all the lakes

and pastures and forests of Hohenszalras. Nothing could better baffle and distract his pursuers; perplexed and blinded, they would be wholly at a loss to trace his steps. It did not occur to him that the fog on the lower lands might mean also storm and snow, and the darkness and dampness of ice-cold vapours, in the upper air where he was.

It had become rough, hard, toilsome work; he was bruised, and almost lame, and very tired. But the spirit in him was not crushed; he kept always thinking: 'If it did not hurt, it would be nothing to do it.'

He had now got above all grass; the ground was loose shingle where it was not bare granite, limestone, or marble, on all of which it was difficult to keep a hold. There was snow not very far above him. The air here was intensely cold. He had not thought to bring any furs with him. His limbs were sorely cramped, his feet began to feel numb, his fingers were so chilled he could hardly grip his alpenstock; the hard slopes gave scarcely any footing to his climbing-irons; there were clouds about him enveloping him, freezing him in their icy mist. He began to think piteously of his brother, of his home, and of the warm-cushioned nooks by the study fire, but he would not give in; he toiled on, cutting and

hurting his hands and knees as he groped on his upward way. He reminded himself of Wratislaw, of Cassabianca, and all the boy-heroes he had ever read of; he would not yield in endurance to any one of them.

But, looking up, he knew by the colour of the sky that it was about to snow; the heavens were of a leaden uniform grey, and seemed to meet and touch the mountain. Then Bela knew that in all likelihood he would never see Gela or his home again.

He choked down the sob that rose in his throat, and tried to think what he could do to save himself. The ascent was now so steep that he could make no upward way, and could barely keep himself from sliding downwards. He caught at a projecting boulder and pulled himself with great effort up on to it; there he could sit in a cramped position and take breath. When he looked down he saw no forests, no land, no rocks, nothing but a sea of fog, which had gathered thick and grey beneath him. In autumn and spring the mountain weather changes in ten minutes from fair to foul.

The odd stupor that comes from long exposure at a great altitude in cold and vapour was stealing over him. Strange noises sounded in his ears, and his feet and hands tingled. He began to fear that he should get

no further on his way, and he had not listened so often to the tales told by huntsmen without knowing clearly enough the dangers which await those who are out on the mountain side in bad weather when daylight goes.

As he sat there, gazing dizzily into the ocean of vapour below him, and upward to the huge walls of granite and of snow, he saw coming and descending towards him from out the clouds a huge dark bird; the immense wings seemed wide as heaven itself as it circled and swept the air.

Bela's heart stood still: it was a male eagle, a golden eagle, and he knew it.

The child's aching eyes watched the monarch of the upper air with a horrible fascination. It looked black as night against the steely sky, the snow-covered peaks.

He sat erect, and cried aloud to it in half delirious indignant reproof. 'Oh, you great bird! you are treacherous, you are thankless! *We* have spared you and yours always, and now you will kill me! Oh, do you not hear? The Szalras have always spared you! Do you not hear?' But the shouts of his young voice died away against the granite walls around him, and the king-bird paused not, but came nearer, and nearer, and nearer.

It circled round and round, and each circle

narrowed, till it was poised immediately above his head, motionless, balancing itself upon its outstretched pinions. He could see its eyes bent on him, see the giant claws drawn up against its belly, see the hooked yellow beak. The eagle was lord of the air, and he had intruded on its royalty: in another moment he felt that it would descend on him and bear him off in its talons or batter him to death with the blows of its wings. He drew his little sword and waited for it; his eyes did not shrink, his body did not cower; he looked upward with his toy-blade drawn in as true a courage as that of Leonidas.

'If only I could take him home once—once—I would not mind dying here afterwards,' he thought, in his dreamy exultation; '*Gott und mein Schwert!*' he muttered, and waited still, calmly. Yet to die with his errand undone—that seemed cruel.

The huge dark mass balanced itself one moment more, then measuring its prey rushed through the air towards him. But, ere it had seized him, a shot flashed through the shadows, and rang through the silence; the bird dropped dead in a ring of blood on the naked stone of the mountain side.

Bela sprang up, and tottering on the slippery shelving rock threw his arms outward with a loud cry.

'I came to find you!' he shouted, in his rapturous joy; then cold and fatigue and past terror conquered him. He swooned at his father's feet.

Sabran had not known that it was his son whom he saved. He had seen a child menaced by a bird of prey, and so had fired. When the boy staggered to him with that cry of welcome, he was for the moment stunned with amazement and gratitude and inexpressible emotion; the next he raised the little brave body in his arms.

'Oh! tell me where your mother kissed you last, that I may set my lips there!' he murmured to the child: but Bela heard not.

He was cold, inanimate, and senseless. He had gained his goal, but he had no sight or sense to know it. His father looked around him with terror for his sake. The snow had begun to fall, the darkness was deepening, the mists were creeping upward; he, who for three years had dwelt a mountaineer amidst these mountains, knew the danger of being belated amidst them in autumn, when, at a stroke, autumn became winter; sometimes in a single night. He himself had his dwelling far from there upon the Isel water, under the Umbal glacier. If he had to carry the boy it would be useless to dream of reaching the rude place

which he had made his home: the weight of a tall child of ten years old is no light burden, and he knew that even if Bela regained his consciousness he would be incapable of exertion in the cold, which would intensify with every hour. But he wasted no moments in hesitation. He knew what the white fall of those softly-descending feathers from above, what the darkness and wetness of the dense fog down below, meant, out on the spurs of Glöckner after sunset. Lives were lost here every year; herds that had stayed on the Alps too late were surprised and destroyed by early snow-storms; pedlars and carriers were belated, and sent to a last sleep by that sudden plunge of autumn into frost. He knew his way inch by inch, and he knew that there was, some mile or so beyond him, the Wandahutte, erected in a dangerous pass by his wife, as a thanksgiving in the first months of their marriage. There he would find a rude bed, food, wine, and shelter for the night. He set himself to reach it.

It was hard to climb with the child, held by one arm, and thrown across one shoulder, as shepherds throw a disabled lamb. His other hand gripped his alpenstock; he had left his rifle under a ledge of rock, as a useless load. He had stripped off the hunter's jacket that he wore, and wrapped it round Bela,

whose body and limbs felt frozen. Down below in the valleys fruit trees had still their plums and pears, and asters and dahlias still flowered, but at this elevation the cold was piercing and the snow froze as it fell.

A high wind also had risen, as the day declined, and blew the white powder of the snow in whirling clouds: the terrible *tourmente* of the Alps which every traveller dreads. In the confusion of it he knew that he might walk round and round on the same road all night, making no progress. Soon it grew dark, though not quite four o'clock. He had no light with him, for he had not intended to be out at night; he had but come thither, as he often came, to see the distant gleam of the Szalrassee, the far-off outline of the Hohenszalrasburg. He had been reascending and returning when he had seen a child menaced by an eagle, and had fired. Had he been by himself he would have found the hut speedily, but weighted with the burden of Bela's inert body he made little way, and staggered often on the slippery frozen steep. He had no hands free to wield his hatchet and cut his way by steps over the ice which had formed in all the fissures of the rocks.

The mountains had been his only friends in his exile. He had returned to them, he had

dwelt amongst them, he had borne his sorrows through their help, and strengthened himself with their strength. But they menaced him sorely now. For himself he cared not, but his heart ached for the child, whose courage and affection had brought him thither to meet his death.

'My poor Bela!' he murmured, as the boy's fair head hung over his shoulder, 'why did you come to me? I give you nothing but evil. Safety, comfort, happiness, honour, all come from *her*.'

The whole heavens seemed to open, so dense a storm of snow now poured upon him. There were strange deep noises ever and again, as from the very bowels of the hills; a thousand times had he rejoiced to match his strength against the mountains and to conquer, but now they were his masters. All around him were the bastions and walls and domes of the great ice peaks; the huge glaciers hung above like frozen seas suspended; he could not behold them but he felt their presence and their awe.

'The snow is in my blood and my blood is yours, and now it claims us,' he muttered to the senseless ear of the child. He and the child had loved the snow, met it with welcome, sported with it in triumph; and now it killed

them. They would lie down in it, and be one with it for ever.

But although these fancies drifted in his brain, he strove with all his might to keep in movement, to ascend ever in the easterly direction of the refuge which he sought to gain. So far as he could, weighted with his burden and blinded by the darkness, he continued to climb, gripping the hard slopes with his feet and his alpenstock. He had given his coat to the child; the cold made every vein in his own body numb; his limbs pricked and seemed to swell; he had only his woollen shirt, above his linen one, and his velvet breeches between him and the frozen air, that could slay a hundred sheep massed together in their warmth and wool. He knew that the hut was but a mile, or little more, from the place where he had shot the eagle; but half a mile in the snowstorm and the darkness was longer than forty miles in sunshine and fair weather. He could not be even sure that he went aright; he could see nothing; the sky was covered with the low dense clouds; he could only guess. All the slender signs and landmarks, that would even in mere twilight have served to guide his steps, were now hidden. A thick woolly impenetrable gloom enshrouded him; he felt as though he were muffled and suffocated by it, and the fatal

drowsiness—the fatal desire to lie down and be at rest—with which frost kills, stole on him.

With all the manhood in him he resisted it for the child's sake.

He had been climbing and wandering three short hours only, and he had believed that it was midnight at the least. Bela still hung like a lifeless thing over his shoulder, but he felt that his limbs were warmer, and his heart beat feebly, but with regularity.

'God grant me power to save him, for his mother's sake,' thought Sabran; 'then there may come what will.'

He struggled anew against the mortal sleepiness, the increasing numbness, that grew upon himself. Suddenly, as he turned, without knowing it, the corner of a wall of rock he saw a starry light. He knew that it was the lamp of the refuge which, by his wife's command, was lit at twilight every evening the whole year round. It was now but a few roods off; he could see even the outline of the cabin itself, black against its background of snow. But he had taken the wrong path to it. Between him and it there yawned a wide crevasse in the glacier on which he now stood.

He shouted loud, but the wind was louder than his voice. The keeper in the refuge could

not hear. He paused doubtfully. To retrace his steps and seek the right path would be certain destruction; it would take him many miles about, and there was no chance even in the darkness that he would ever find it; his strength, too, was failing him, and the child was still unconscious. There was but one way of escape, to leap the fissure. It was wider than any man could be sure to clear, and if he fell within it he would fall into jagged ice a thousand fathoms down. By daylight he had often looked down into its awful depths, blue in their darkness, set with jagged teeth of ice like a trap's jaws.

The leap might be death or life.

He hesitated a few instants, then drew quite close to the edge, and cast aside his pole, for the chasm was too wide for that to help him, and he needed both hands free to hold the boy more firmly. The lamp from the hut shed light enough to guide him; the snow fell fast, the wind was violent. He paused another moment on the brink, drew the child closer to him and clasped him with both arms; then, gathering all his force into his limbs, he leaped.

He cleared the fissure, but staggered on the slippery ice beyond. He fell heavily, but still held his son so that Bela fell uppermost and dropped upon him.

Crushed by his weight, Sabran sank at full length on the white crystal ground ; alone he would have leaped as surely as the chamois.

The shock awoke Bela from his trance ; he opened his blue eyes giddily.

'It is you ! ' he murmured feebly, as he felt himself lying on his father's breast.

'It is I ! ' said Sabran. 'My child, if you can move, try and creep to that hut and call. I cannot.'

The child, without a sound, trembling sorely, and with a sense of confusion making his head dizzy, obeyed, drew himself slowly up, and dragged his tired, aching, cramped limbs over the snow.

'You are brave,' murmured his father, whose eyes followed him. 'You are your mother's son.'

Bela reached the door of the hut and beat on it with his little frozen hands, and then fell down against it.

'It is I—Count Bela ! ' he managed to cry aloud. 'Come to my father ; quick ! '

The door was flung aside, and the keepers of the hut rushed out at the first cry. They had been asleep. They were old jägers, past the work of the forests, but still strong. Having lighted the beacon without, they had drunk a little wine, and chattered, and then

dosed. Terrified at their own negligence and at the sight of their lady's son, they staggered out into the night, and together they bore the body of Sabran into the refuge. He was unable to rise.

'You cannot move!' sobbed the child, raining kisses on his hands.

'I am stiff from the cold; nothing more,' said his father, faintly.

Then he looked at the men.

'One of you, if it be possible, go to the Burg. Tell the Countess von Szalras that her son is safe. You need not speak of me. Bring the physician here when it is morning; but say nothing of me to-night. Give me a little of your wine——'

His lips were blue, he felt faint; in his own heart he said to himself, 'I am hurt unto death.'

Bela had thrown his arms about him, and, trembling like a leaf, clung there and sobbed aloud deliriously.

'You are hurt, you are hurt, and all for me!' he sobbed, as he saw his father placed on the truckle bed set aside for any belated wanderer on the hills.

Sabran smiled on him.

'My child, do not grieve so; it is nothing;

a mere momentary wrench ; do not even think of it. No, no ! I am not in pain.'

The wine revived him, and restored his strength, and he sought to conceal his injury for the boy's sake.

'Warm some of this wine and give it to my son,' he said to the keeper of the hut; 'then undress him, wrap him warmly, and make him sleep before the fire.'

'You are hurt, you are ill ! ' moaned Bela. 'I came to find you to take you back. Our mother has never been the same ;—she has never smiled——'

'Hush ! ' said Sabran, almost sternly. 'Do not speak of your mother before these men, her servants. You came to seek me, my poor little boy? That was good of you, and it was good to remember me. It is three years——'

Bela clung to him and put his lips to his father's ear, that the men might not hear.

'The others have always prayed for you,' he murmured, 'because we were all told. But me, I have loved you always. I have never thought of anything else. And I have tried to be good, oh ! I *have* tried ! '

A great suffering came on his father's face as he heard the innocent words, and a great tenderness.

'When I am dead, as I shall be so soon, will he remember, too?' he thought.

Aloud he said:

'My child, it is very sweet to me to hear your voice again. But if you love me now, obey me. You will have fever and ague if you do not drink some warm wine, let yourself be undressed, and lie down before the fire. Do not be afraid. You will see me when you awake. I shall not stir.'

He thought as he spoke:

'No, I shall never stir again; they will bear me away to my grave, that is all. I am like a felled tree. All is over. Well, perchance, so best: when I am dead she may forgive—she may love the children.'

When at last Bela, sobbing piteously, had reluctantly obeyed, and when, despite all his struggles, nature, frozen, weary, and worn out, compelled him to close his eager eyes in heavy dreamless slumber, Sabran with a glance called the keeper to him.

'Now the child sleeps,' he said, 'get my clothes off me, if you can. Touch me gently. I think my back is broken.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

IT was twelve o'clock in the night. Wanda von Szalras paced the Rittersaal with feverish steps and limbs which, whilst they quivered with fear, knew no fatigue. It had been nine in the morning when Greswold and the serwants, having searched in vain, came at last to her with the tidings that her first-born son was lost; his bed empty, his clothes gone, his little sword away from its place. All the day she had sought herself, and organised the search of others with all the energy and courage of her race. She had not given way to the despair which had seized her, but in her own soul she had said: 'Does fate chastise me thus for my own cruelty? I have shrunk from their sweet faces because they were like his. For two long

months I exiled them, I thrust them from my presence and my heart. I have been ashamed of them. Does God punish me through them? Shall I lose my children, too? Can I forgive myself? Have I not even wished them unborn? Oh, my Bela, my darling, my first-born! Yes, you are his, but more than all, you are mine!'

When night closed in, and all the many separate search-parties returned, bringing no news of him, she thought that she would lose her reason. All had been done that could be done; the men on the estates were scattered far and wide. It was known that there were snow-storms on the heights; the white fury had even at eventide descended to the lower ground, and the terraces and gardens shone white as the lights of the heavens fell upon them. Every now and then there came the report of a gun on the hills; the men were firing in hope that the child, if lost, might hear the shots. The evening passed on and midnight came, and no one knew where Bela was in those vast forests, those immense hills, all hidden in the impenetrable darkness. She saw him at every moment lying white and cold in some hollow in the snow; she saw the cruel winds blow his curls, his fair limbs stiffen. Every year the winter and the mountains took their toll of lives.

She had known nothing of the purport of the child's disappearance; she had been left to every vague conjecture with which her mind could torture her. The whole household and all the woodsmen and huntsmen had scoured the hills far and wide, and the whole day and night had gone by with no tidings, no result. Sleep had visited no eyes at Hohenszalras; from its terraces the snow-storm and hurricanes beating around the head of Glöckner were discernible by the agitation of the clouds that hid one-half the heights.

Gela had stayed up beside her, his little pale face pressed to the window frame, his terrified eyes staring into the gloom which near at hand grew red with the beacon fires.

As midnight tolled from the clock tower he came to her, and touched her hand.

'Mother,' he whispered, 'I dared not say it before, but I must say it now. I think—I think—Bela is gone to try and bring *him* home.'

'Him!' she echoed, while a thrill ran like fire and ice together through her, from head to foot. 'You mean—your father?'

'Yes.'

She was silent. Her breast heaved.

'What makes you say that?' she asked, at last.

'Bela thought of nothing else all this year and last year, too,' said Gela, in a hushed voice. 'He was always talking of it. When he was smaller he thought of riding all over the world. Yesterday he was so strange, and when we went to bed he kissed me ever so many times; and he prayed a long, long while. And for nothing less would he have taken the sword, I think. And—and I heard the men saying to-day that our father was somewhere near; and I think that Bela might have heard that, and so have gone to bring him home.'

'To bring him home!'

The words, uttered in his son's soft, grave, flute-like voice, pierced her heart. She could not speak.

'Will he rob me even of my first-born?' she thought, bitterly.

At that moment Greswold entered. Gela, looking in his face, gave a shout of joy.

'You have found my Bela!' he cried, flinging his arms about the old man.

'Yes, your brother is safe, quite safe! My Lady hears?'

She heard, and the first tears that she had ever shed for years rushed to her eyes. She drew Gela, with a passionate gesture, to her side, and falling on her knees beside the Imperial throne in the Rittersaal, praised God.

Then, when she rose, she cried in very ecstasy :

'Fetch him; bring him at once!—oh, my child! Who found him? Who has him now? If a peasant saved his life, he and his shall have the finest of all my land in Iselthal in grant for ever and for ever!——'

Greswold looked at her timidly; then said :

'May I speak to your Excellency alone?'

She touched Gela's hair tenderly.

'Go, my darling, and bear the good news to our reverend mother. You know how she has suffered.'

The boy obeyed and left the hall. She turned to Greswold.

'Tell me all, now.'

The old man hesitated, then took his courage up and answered.

'My Lady—his father found your son.'

She put her hand out and clenched the arm of the throne as if to save herself from falling.

'His father!' she echoed. 'How came he there? Answer me, with the truth, the whole truth.'

'My Countess,' said Greswold, while his voice shook, 'your husband has dwelt amidst the Glöckner slopes almost for the last three years.

When he left here he remained absent awhile, but not long. He has lived in utter solitude. Few knew it. The few who did kept his secret. I was one of these. He had corresponded with me ever since he left your house. You may remember being angered?'

She made a gesture of assent.

'Go on,' she murmured. 'He found my child, you say?'

'He found Count Bela; yes. It seems he had come as near here as some nine miles eastward; near the hut which your Excellency built, not very long after your marriage, on the crest of the Adler Spitze, in consequence of the fatal accident to the Bavarian pedlars. He knew nothing of Count Bela's loss, but there he saw a young boy threatened by an eagle, and shot the bird. The fog was even then coming on upon the heights. He found his son insensible from fatigue, and cold, and terror, and bore him in his arms until he reached the refuge. He had been near it all the time, but as the mist deepened and the snow fell he lost his way, and must have gone round and round on the same path for hours. We were, in sheer despair, mounting towards the Adler Spitze, though we did not believe the child could have possibly got so far, when we met one of the keepers descending with the news. The storm is at its height;

we could only grope our way, and we missed it many times, so that we have been four mortal hours and more coming downward those seven miles. The keeper said that my lord desired you should hear at once of the safety of the child, but not of his own presence in the hut. But I felt that your Excellency should be told of all.'

'You were right. I thank you. You have been ever faithful to me and mine.'

She stretched out her hand to him in dismissal, and sought a refuge in her oratory.

She felt that she must be alone.

She almost forgot the safety of her first-born in the sense that his father was near her. She fell on her knees before the Christ of Andermeyer and praised heaven for her child's preservation, and with a passion of tears besought guidance in her struggle with what now seemed to her the long and cruel hardness of her heart.

To hear thus of him whom once she had adored, blinded her to all save the memories of the past, which thronged upon her. If he had repented so greatly was it not her obligation to meet his penitence with pardon? It would be bitter to her to live out her life beside one whose word she would for ever doubt, whose disloyalty had cut to the roots of the pride and

purity of her race. Nevermore between them could there be the undoubting faith, the unblemished trust, which are the glorious noonday of a cloudless love. She might forgive, but never, never, she thought, would she be able to command forgetfulness.

But for that very reason, maybe, would her duty lie this way.

The knowledge of those lonely desolate years, passed so near her, whilst he kept the dignity and the humility of silence, touched all the generosity of her nature. She knew that he had suffered; she believed that, though he had betrayed her, he had loved and honoured her in honesty and truth. One lie had poisoned his life, as a rusted nail driven through an oak tree in its prime corrodes and kills it. But he had not been a liar always. She had made his life her own in bygone years: was she not bound now to redeem it, to raise it, to shelter it on her heart and in her home? Was not the very shrinking scorn she felt for his past a reason the more that she should bend her pride to union with him? She had thought of her life ever as the poet of the flower:

> the ever sacred cup
> Of the pure lily hath between my hands,
> Felt safe unsoiled, nor lost one grain of gold.

Had there been egotism in the purity of it, self-love beneath love of honour? Had she

treasured the 'grain of gold' in her hands rather with the Pharisee's arrogance of purity than with the true humility of the acolyte?

She kneeled there before the carven Christ in an anguish of doubt.

He had given her back her first-born. Should she be less generous to him?

Should she for ever arrogate the right of judgment against him, or should she stretch the palm of pardon even across that great gulf of wrong dividing them as by a bottomless pit?

Tears came like dew to her parched heart. It was the first time that she had ever wept since the night when she had exiled him. Three long barren years had drifted by; years cold and dark and joyless as the winter days which bound the earth under bands of iron, and let no living thing or creeping herb rejoice or procreate.

When she rose from her knees her mind was made up, a great peace had descended on her soul. She had forgiven her own dishonour. She had laid her heart bare before God and plucked her pride up from its bleeding roots.

All the early hours of her love recurred to her with an aching remembrance, which had lost its shame and was sweet in its very pain.

His crime was still dark as the night in her eyes, but her conscience and her awakening tenderness spoke together and pleaded for her pardon.

What was love if not one long forgiveness? What raised it higher than the senses if not its infinite patience and endurance of all wrong? What was its hope of eternal life if it had not gathered strength in it enough to rise above human arrogance and human vengeance?

'Oh, my love, my love!' she cried aloud. 'We will live our lives out together!'

Her resolve was taken when she left her oratory and traversed her apartments to those of the Princess Ottilie, who met her with eager words of joy, herself tremulous and feeble after the anxious terrors of the past day. Some look on Wanda's face checked the utterance of her gladness.

'Is it not true?' she said in sudden fear. 'Is the child not found?'

'Yes; his father has found him,' she answered simply. 'Dear mother, long you have condemned me; judged me unchristian, unmerciful, harsh. I know not whether you were right, or I. God knows, we cannot. But give me your blessing ere I go out into the night. I go to him; I will bring him here.'

The other gazed at her doubting, incredulous, touched to a great hope.

'Bring him?' she echoed, 'your child?'

'My husband.'

'You will do that?—ah! mercy is ever blessed; the grace of Heaven will be with you!'

She sighed as she raised her head.

'Who can tell? Perhaps my harshness will make heaven harsh to me.'

When she came forth again from her own rooms she was clothed in a fur-lined riding-habit.

'Bid them saddle a horse used to the hills,' she said, 'and let Otto and two other men be ready to go with me.'

'It is a fearful night,' Greswold ventured to suggest. 'It will be as bad a dawn. It snows even here. We met the keeper almost midway up the Adler Spitze, yet it took us four hours to make the descent.'

She did not even seem to hear him.

'May I follow?' he asked her humbly. She gave a sign of assent, and stood motionless and mute; her thoughts were far away.

When the horse was brought she went out into the night. The storm of the upper hills had descended to the lower; the wind was blowing icily and strong, the snow was falling fast, but

on the lower lands it did not freeze as it fell, and riding was possible, though at a slow pace from the great darkness. She knew every step of the way through her own woods and up to the spurs of the Glöckner. She rode on till the ascent grew too steep for any animal; then she abandoned the horse to one of her attendants, took her alpenstock and went on her way towards the Adler Spitze on foot, the men with their lanterns lighting the ground in front of her. It was wild weather and grew wilder the nearer it grew to dawn. There was danger at every step from slippery frozen ground, from thin ice that might break over bottomless abysses. The snow was driven in her face, and the wind tore madly at her clothes. But she was used to the mountains and held on steadily, refusing the rope which Otto entreated her to take and permit him to fasten to his loins. They kept to the right paths, for their strong lights enabled them to see whither they went. Once they crept along a narrow ledge where a man could barely stand. The ascent was long and weary in the teeth of the weather; it tried even the stout jägers; but she scarcely felt the force of the wind, the chill of the black frost.

No woman but one used as she was to measure her strength with her native Alps

could have lived through that night, which tried hardly even the hunters born and bred amidst the snow summits. By day the ascent hither was difficult and dangerous after the summer months, but after nightfall the sturdiest mountaineer dreamed not of facing it. But on those heights above her, in the dark yonder, beneath the clouds, were her husband and her child. That knowledge sufficed to nerve her limbs to preternatural power, and the men who followed her were loyal and devoted to her service; they would have lain down to die at her word.

When her body seemed to sink with the burden of fatigue and cold, she looked up into the blackness of the air, and thought that those she sought were there, and fancied that already she heard their voices. Then she gathered new strength and crept onward and upward, her hands and feet clinging to the bare rock, the smooth ice, as a swallow clings to a house wall.

She had issued from a battle more bitter with her own soul; and had conquered.

At last they neared the refuge built by and named from her, and set amidst the desolation of the snow-fields. She signed to her men to stay without, and walking onward alone drew near the heavy door.

She opened it a little way, paused a moment, drawing her breath with effort; then looked into the cabin. It was a mere hut of two chambers made of pitch pine, and lighted by a single window. There was no light but from the pallid day without, which had barely broken. Before the fire of burning logs was a nest of hay, and in it lay the child, sleeping a deep and healthful sleep, his hands folded on his breast, his face flushed with warmth and recovered life, his long lashes dark upon his cheeks.

His father was stretched still as a statue on the truckle-bed of the keeper who watched beside him.

The day had now broken, clear, pale, cold; the faint rose of sunrise was behind the snow peaks of the Glöckner, and an *alpenflühevogel* was trilling and tripping on the frozen ground. From a distant unseen hamlet far below there came a faint sound of morning bells.

She thrust the door further open and entered. She made a gesture to the keeper, who started up with a low obeisance, to go without. She fastened the latch upon him; then, without waking the sleeping child, went up to her husband's bed. His eyes were closed; he did not notice the opening and shutting of the door;

he was still and white as the snow without; he looked weary and exhausted.

At sight of him all the great love she had once borne him sprang up in all its normal strength; her heart swelled with unspeakable emotion; she stood and gazed on him with thirsty eyes tired of their long denial.

Stirred by some vague sense of her presence near him he looked up and saw her; all his blood rushed into his face. He could not speak. She stooped towards him and laid her hand gently upon his.

'I am come to thank you.'

Her voice trembled.

He gave a restless sigh.

'Ah! for the child's sake,' he murmured. 'You do not come for me!——'

She hesitated a moment, then she gathered all her strength and all her mercy.

'I come for you,' she answered in low clear tones. 'I will forget all else except that I once loved you.'

His face grew transfigured with a great joy.

He could not speak; he gazed at her.

'You were my lover, you are my children's father. You shall return to us,' she murmured, while her voice seemed to him heard in some dream of Heaven. 'Your sin was great, yes;

but love pardons all sins, nay, effaces them, washes them out, makes them as though they were not. I know that now. What have not been my own sins?—my coldness, my harshness, my cruel unyielding pride? Nay, sometimes I have thought of late my fault was darker than your own; more hateful in God's sight.'

'Noblest of all women always!' he said faintly. 'If it be true, if it be true, stoop down and kiss me once again.'

She stooped, and touched his lips with hers.

The child slept on in his nest of hay before the burning wood. The silence of the high hills reigned around them. The light of the risen day came through the small square window of the hut. Outside the bird still sang.

He looked up in her eyes, and his own eyes smiled with celestial joy.

'I am happy!' he said simply. 'I have lived amongst your hills almost ever since that night, that I might see your shadow as you passed, hear the feet of your horses in the woods. The men were faithful; they never told. Kiss me once more. You believe, say you believe, *now*, that I did love you though I wronged you so?'

'I do believe,' she answered him. 'I think God cannot pardon me that I ever doubted!'

Then, as she saw that he still lay quite motionless, not turning towards her, though his eyes sought hers, a sudden terror smote dully at her heart.

'Are you hurt? Cannot you move?' she whispered. 'Look at me; speak to me! It is dawn already; you shall come home at once.'

He smiled.

'Nay, love, I shall not move again. My spine is hurt, not broken, I believe—but hurt beyond help; paralysis has begun. My angel, grieve not for me, I shall die happy. You love me still! Ah, it is best thus; were I to live, my sin and shame might still torture you, still part us, but when I am dead you will forget them. You are so generous, you are so great, you will forget them. You will only remember that we were happy once, happy through many a long sweet year, and that I loved you;—loved you in all truth, though I betrayed you!'

. . . . . .

The hunters bore him gently down in the cool pale noontide along the peaceful mountain side homeward to Hohenszalras, and there, after eleven days, he died.

The white marble in its carven semblance

of him lies above his grave in the Silver Chapel; but in the heart of his wife he lives for ever, and with him lives a sleepless and an eternal remorse.

THE END.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Form L9–10*m*-3,'48(A7920)444

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

PR De la Ramee -
4527 Wanda.
W18
v.3

Delayed Paging

PR
4527
W18
v.3

SOUTHEAN REGIONAL LIBRARY FAC
AA 000 370 026 7